

REV

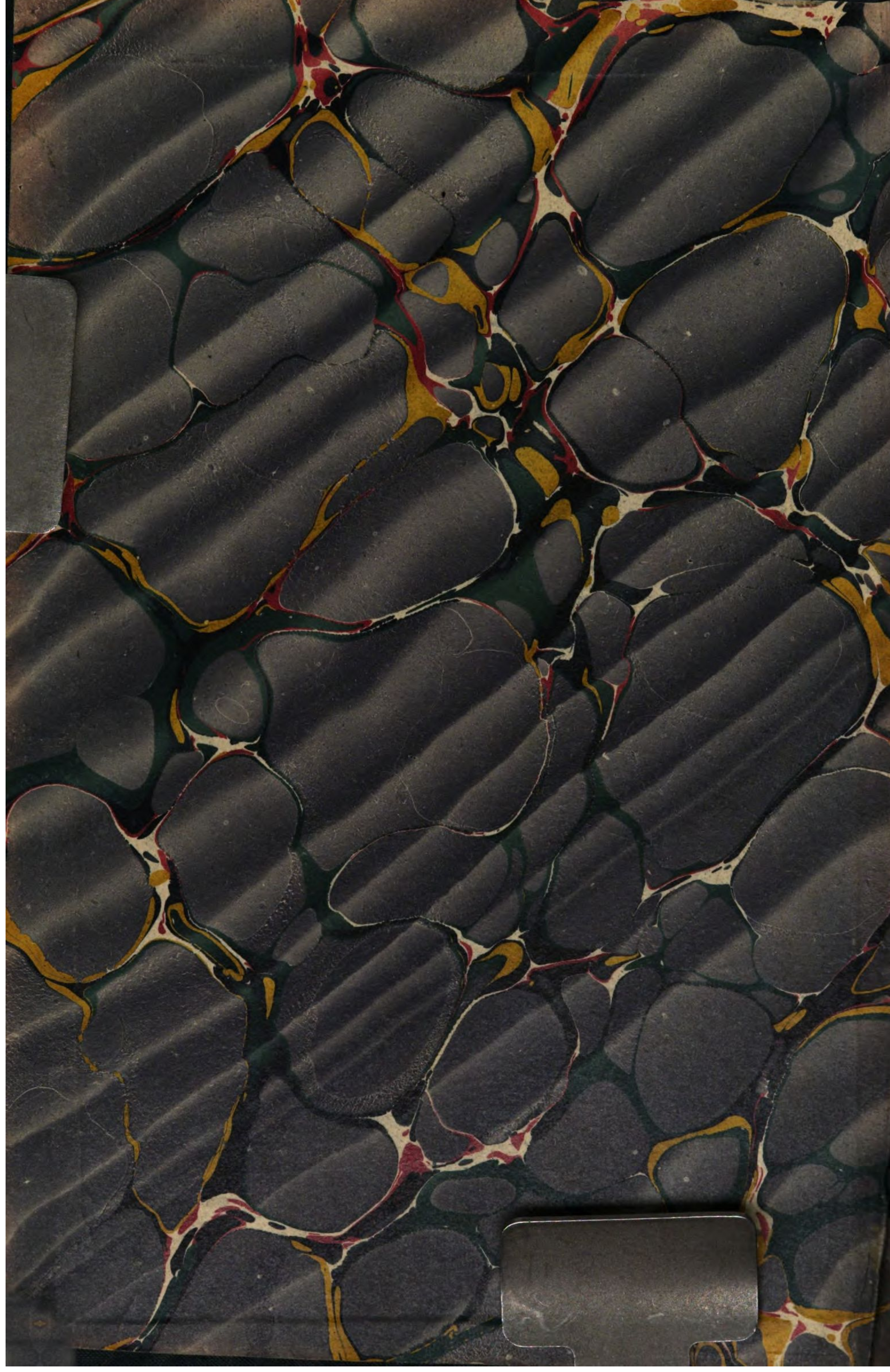
PLUS

AGENCY

WORD

11

11





<36601623940010

<36601623940010

Bayer. Staatsbibliothek

A. gr. a. 2807 ~~£~~

Hiz: 582

~~<36613694160019~~

~~<36613694160019~~

~~Bayern Staatsbibliothek~~



THE

OF

THE

THE

THE

THE

THE



THE
AGAMEMNON
OF
ÆSCHYLUS

TRANSLATED FROM THE GREEK
ILLUSTRATED BY A DISSERTATION ON
GRECIAN TRAGEDY, &c.
BY JOHN S. HARFORD ESQ^R D.C.L. F.R.S.



LONDON JOHN MURRAY,

MDCCCXXXI.

T/73/345

1831

TO
THE RIGHT REVEREND
JOHN, LORD BISHOP OF LINCOLN,

THE FOLLOWING PAGES ARE INSCRIBED,

BY THE AUTHOR,

IN GRATEFUL ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

OF HIS INVALUABLE FRIENDSHIP,

NOR LESS

IN TESTIMONY OF SINCERE RESPECT

FOR HIS PUBLIC AND PRIVATE VIRTUES,

AND FOR HIS ABLE APPLICATION

OF THE VARIOUS AND PROFOUND LEARNING,

BY WHICH HE IS DISTINGUISHED,

TO THE ILLUSTRATION OF CHRISTIAN ANTIQUITY.

Bayerische
Staatsbibliothek
München

PREFACE.



IN the following pages a new translation is attempted of the Agamemnon of Æschylus.

The object of the preliminary Dissertation, is to condense within a short compass the principal facts which illustrate the history, the poetical merits, and the moral qualities of Grecian Tragedy.

Though, in an essay introductory to a translation of a drama of Æschylus, he naturally forms the prominent figure, it is hoped that the chief alterations or improvements introduced into the tragic art by his two illustrious imitators and rivals will be found in the course of it accurately noted.

The author has referred to original authorities

Although various translations of this drama have been published, distinguished by no ordinary ability, the author deems the path yet open of honorable competition. So great indeed are the obstacles to success, arising out of the peculiar style of certain parts of the original, that, like the bow of Ulysses in the hand of the suitors, it seems destined to invite and to baffle the efforts of successive translators.

The difficulty of transfusing the beauties and peculiarities of a Greek or a Latin poet into a modern language, is indeed so great, that *he* must entertain a most presumptuous notion of his own powers, who can submit such a production to the ordeal of public criticism without unfeigned diffidence and an earnest appeal to the indulgence of his readers.

If a close adherence to the literal meaning of the original were alone requisite, every sound scholar might be a successful translator. But mere learning, however ably it may develop the sense, or illustrate the allusions of the classical

poets, can no more do justice to the flashes of airy fancy and impassioned feeling, of brilliant sentiment and graceful expression, which sparkle in their pages, than a philosopher could imitate by any artificial means the coruscations of lightning.

Literal translation (to quote Dryden) is very similar to dancing on ropes with fettered legs; a man may shun a fall by using caution, but gracefulness of motion is not to be expected.

Yet even this extreme is more tolerable than that paraphrastic redundancy which sacrifices the nature and truth, the point and terseness of the original, and transmutes the laconic language of passion or feeling into high-sounding declamation. It is like diluting a fine essence till its peculiar charm and exhilarating qualities are wholly extinguished. Easily described, but rarely attained, is that happy medium between these opposite extremes, by which the sense of a classical poet is faithfully transfused into another tongue, in a style and manner not only poetical, but which recal the original to a critical reader. Occasionally the

English idiom conforms with singular aptitude to classical phraseology, especially in the more colloquial scenes of the Grecian dramatists; but when conversation becomes elevated into poetry, or when proverbial, humorous, or figurative passages occur, it will frequently happen that the only just mode of conveying any correct impression of their force or beauty, is to search our language for expressions of corresponding spirit and meaning, though often widely distant from verbal resemblance. Any considerable departure from this degree of fidelity can only be justified in the case of such extraordinary conciseness or obscurity as defies all but very free translation. Pindar is known to abound in such passages, and they not unfrequently occur in the choruses of the Greek tragedies.

These principles of translation condemn, it is true, one of the finest poems of this description in our own or in any language; for Pope's Homer abounds in exquisite beauties and splendid passages, the creation in a great degree of his own fancy; while the peculiar energy, the venerable

simplicity, and the expressive touches of nature in the original, are not seldom sought there in vain.* It must be replied, that translators of ordinary mould will never be wanting, but we have only had one Pope, and perhaps never shall have another; and therefore, though his “belle Infidelle” unquestionably wants the peculiar beauties of Homer, she has so many of her own, and those so enchanting, that Criticism in her presence is charmed into submission, if not into acquiescence, by the force of a spell which is felt to be irresistible:

“Cessit immanis tibi blandienti

Janitor aulæ

Cerberus: quamvis furiale centum

Muniant angues caput ejus.”—*Hor.*

The author may perhaps be permitted to state with what degree of strictness he has found it possible to apply the above principles to the follow-

* A very elegant translation of Homer, in which the peculiar errors of Pope are avoided, and both the scholar and the poet are conspicuous, has lately appeared from the pen of Mr. Sotheby.

ing translation. The dialogue of *Æschylus*, though often figurative or enigmatical, and sometimes turgid, is in general simple and perspicuous. Occasionally it is obscure and perplexing from a confusion of metaphors, or through abrupt phraseology; but as these blemishes are not frequent, it admits for the most part of being translated with fidelity to the sense, manner, and style of the original. The author must entirely refer to the judgment of critical readers the degree of his success. If in this, the main portion of the poem, he has essentially failed, the fault upon the preceding premises is his own.

With respect to the choral parts the case is different. Close translation is here out of the question, or, if attempted, would in general issue in riddle or enigma. The truth is, that it is impossible to translate a chorus of *Æschylus* into English, so as at once to be faithful to the original, and to be intelligible to an English reader. The vagueness and indistinctness in which his images are frequently involved—the abruptness and obscurity of his language—the implication rather than the

development of his moral ideas—the allusions to customs, and habits, and opinions, altogether foreign from our own—render the difficulty insurmountable. In order to be understood it is necessary to be somewhat diffuse, and diffuseness is at variance with the style of Æschylus in his choral odes.

That strict fidelity, therefore, to the literal sense and manner of the original which the translator has attempted in the dialogue, he is quite sensible that he has not attained in the choruses. They are, what, after many experiments and much labor, he found to be alone possible, free translations.

The class of critics who will receive this candid avowal with the greatest indulgence is that of eminent scholars—should any such be induced to cast an eye upon these pages—who, from being aware of the justice of the foregoing remarks upon the choral parts of the sublime but obscure original, will be the first to pardon inevitable defects, and to make allowance for imperfect execution. In difficult or corrupted passages the ablest commentators have invariably been consulted, and of dif-

ferent senses what on the whole appeared the most probable has been followed.

The work, such as it is, was not commenced with a view to publication. The admiration with which a first perusal of the original inspired the author, led him to revert again and again to its classic pages with increasing delight, till some of the finest passages became so interwoven with his memory as to induce him to essay on them, in moments of leisure, his powers of translation. The undertaking thus commenced was subsequently more seriously prosecuted, and after imparting a charm to various intervals of rural leisure, amidst the engagements of an active life, was finally completed some years ago. In this state it was seen by various friends, to whose learning and taste the author has every reason to defer, and but for their favourable opinion it would never have been submitted to the public eye. In making this allusion he owes it to his own feelings to express his obligation to his learned friend the Bishop of Lincoln for several criticisms on the text of *Æschylus*, and

to Professor Smyth for various suggestions which have removed as many blemishes from the diction of the poem. Nor can he deny himself the gratification of adding that his attention was directed to some interesting points touched upon in the preliminary dissertation by the Bishop of Salisbury, whose zeal in the cause of literature, at an advanced age, is that of an ardent scholar in his youthful prime.

The notes added to the poem are chiefly intended for English readers. The general grounds on which a particular sense is adopted in difficult passages are occasionally stated; but to have indulged in a work like this in minute verbal criticism would have been useless pedantry.

The accompanying plates are from ancient gems or busts, with the exception of three designs by Flaxman, which will lose nothing by a comparison with the most classical productions of antiquity.*

* The mention of the name of this truly distinguished artist recalls to my memory a feeling tribute

For the plan of a Greek theatre, with its picturesque accompaniment, as also for a learned illustration of it, (printed in the appendix,) the author is indebted to his friend C. R. Cockerell, Esq., who has already shown the public, in various instances, how much light may be reflected on ancient sculpture and on classical topography by ingenious conjecture, when restrained and directed by professional science, elegant learning, and accurate local investigation.

paid to his genius by the generous and accomplished Canova. "You come to Rome," said he to me, "and admire my works, while you possess in your own country, in Flaxman, an artist whose designs excel in classical grace all that I am acquainted with in modern art."

ADDITIONAL ERRATA.

- PAGE 30—last line of reference, *for* “Rand” *read* “Ranæ.”
113—line 1—*for* “became” *read* “become.”
128—*for* “appears” *read* “appear.”
206—at the bottom, *for* “Lucretius” *read* “Lucretium.”

NOTATION

THE JOURNAL OF

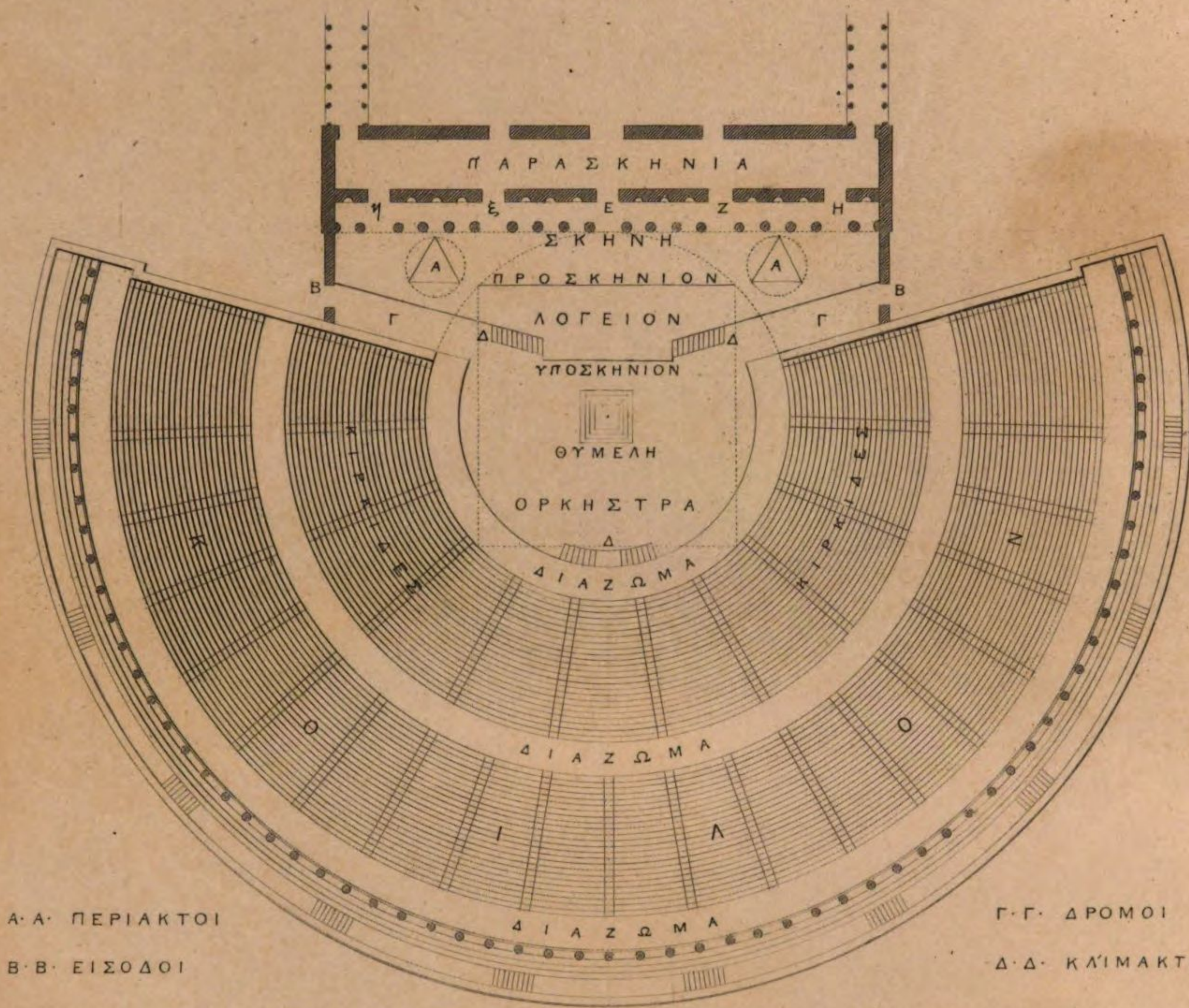
THE JOURNAL OF THE
THE JOURNAL OF THE
THE JOURNAL OF THE
THE JOURNAL OF THE

A DISSERTATION
ON
GRECIAN TRAGEDY.

NOTATION

GRECIAN ALPHABET

0 50 100 200 feet





A. R. Cooperati del.

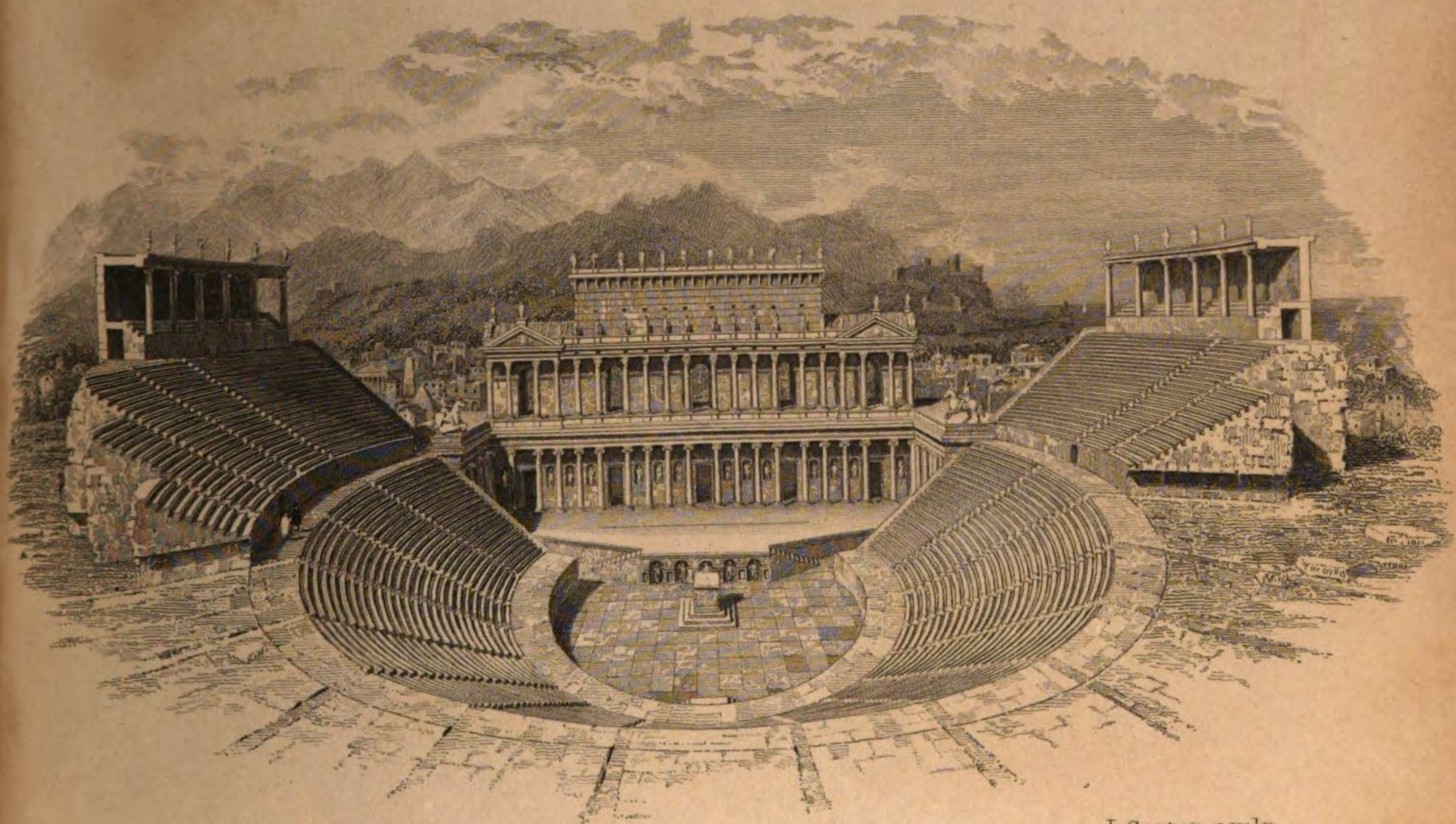
A. T. B. S. A. T. O. I.

B. R. C. I. S. A. T. O. I.

C. S. I. S. A. T. O. I.

D. S. I. S. A. T. O. I.

E. S. I. S. A. T. O. I.



C.R. Cockerell del.

J. Carter sculp.

A DISSERTATION
ON
GRECIAN TRAGEDY.

To assign with critical accuracy to a particular age or people the origin of dramatic, or interlocutory poetry, is as impossible as to trace to their fountain-head the earliest streams of genius and invention.

The researches of Oriental scholars render it probable that this form of poetry existed in the East in times beyond the ken of history,* and

* Vide Sir William Jones's third and seventh discourses before the Asiatic Society, and his preface to the *Sacountala*, in the course of which he says, "dramatic poetry must have been immemorially ancient in the Indian empire."

The invention of the drama in India, according to a

that it was indigenous among various nations. If, however, the claims of Indian or Chinese literature to the honours of remote antiquity should be disputed, those of the muse of Sion cannot be denied. The Book of Job, in which sublime poetry and divine wisdom are so beautifully blended, and the Song of Songs of Solomon, are positive examples of the existence, in the East, of this species of composition, at a period when the echoes of Delphi and of Helicon were mute to the voice of the muses, and the banks of the Ilyssus were trodden only by barbarian tribes.

The Asiatic origin of the Greek language may now be regarded as an admitted fact, and a similar origin must consequently be assigned to a large proportion of the first settlers of Greece. Not only their language, but also their mythology, rich

later writer on Hindoo literature, Mr. Hayman Wilson, is referred to an inspired sage, named Bharata, but, he adds, some authorities ascribe to it the still more elevated origin of having been communicated to the Vedas by the god Brahmà.

in Asiatic fables, images, and allusions, leads to this conclusion. These popular traditions were probably embodied in oral poetry and music, exhibiting under various forms the initial rudiments of lyrical, heroic, and dramatic composition. Eastern analogies justify this supposition, and so do the incidents and style of many of those fables.

The dramatic seems a form of composition almost natural to man as a social, and, as Aristotle calls him, an imitative being,* who delights in all that can most vividly realize to his imagination scenes and sentiments calculated to arouse his feelings, excite his sympathies, or act upon his taste for the marvellous. In the first ages of the world, when the artificial resources favourable to leisure and to study were rare,† and society wore a patriarchal aspect, its circumstances were of necessity pecu-

* Τό, τε γὰρ μιμεῖσθαι σύμφυτον τοῖς ἀνθρώποις ἐκ παίδων ἐστὶ.—*Arist. de Poet.* cap. iv.

† Philosophy, says Plato in his Republic, commences with leisure.

liarly social, and the records of memory must therefore have been in a certain sense dramatic.

The poetry of a philosophical and polished age is more strongly marked by a tone of reflection and sentiment,—the results of self-inspection, experience, and refinement; but it is less social in its character, and not equally rich in the display of those simple but vivid impressions, which the grand objects of nature, and the ties of kindred and of country, make upon a primitive and unadulterated people.

Thus the earliest poetry and history are in an especial sense dramatic. Homer is more dramatic and less sentimental than Virgil; Herodotus than Thucydides; and the early chroniclers of modern history than the more polished and classical compilers of later date. If we regard the Scriptures of the Old Testament, for a moment, merely in the light of a literary composition, it will be found that the oldest portions are the most dramatic. The history of Abraham, and that of Joseph and his brethren, for example, derive a peculiar interest

and animation, not merely from their picturesque delineation of ancient manners, and their fidelity to nature, but also from that close approach to the semblance of reality, which their dramatic character produces. The reader is almost ready to persuade himself, that he is present at scenes so graphically described. Among the many illustrations that might be cited, what, for example, can be more impressive, or more interesting, than the conversation in which Joseph, knowing his brethren but as yet unknown by them, anxiously inquires after his aged father? “And he asked his brethren of their welfare, and said, Is your father well? the old man of whom ye spake, is he yet alive? And they answered, Thy servant our father is in good health, he is yet alive. And they bowed down their heads and made obeisance.”—*Gen.* xliii. 27, 28.

The artificial beauties of composition,—the lofty declamation, for instance, of Racine or Alfieri,—may charm the ears of a Parisian or a Tuscan auditory, but lose their power, when translated

into a foreign dialect; whereas the simple pathos, the tenderness and nature of these and similar passages of the sacred writings, will be felt in every portion of the globe, as long as the human affections animate the human frame.

Dramatic composition may therefore be defined in a general sense—*imitative narrative*. It is a closer approximation in its form to action and reality than mere narrative, and assists the imagination of the reader in depicting in the most lively manner the scenes and the characters, which it brings before his view.

This general definition will include all the various forms of interlocutory composition, as tragedy and comedy, the eclogue, the idyl, and the Socratic dialogue.

But though, in a general manner, dramatic poetry may be thus described, the specimens of this species of writing, which have appeared under the form of ancient tragedy, have made so deep an impression on mankind, that the term has insensibly, and by a sort of common consent, been restricted in its

highest and most peculiar sense to tragic composition, and, thus considered, the acknowledged parent of this, the noblest form of the drama, is Greece.

The brightest period of Grecian tragedy was coeval with the most brilliant portion of Grecian history. This period commences with the battle of Marathon, and extends itself through the age of Pericles to that of Alexander.

The intellectual and the political glory of Greece were at their acmé till towards its close; and the stirring energy of mind, the inspiring soul of genius, pervaded her active population, more or less, from the coasts of the Ægean sea to the foot of Mount Etna.

Athens was the centre of this great intellectual movement, and the most eminent individuals on whom it acted were natives of her soil. Thebes, it is true, could boast her Pindar; Halicarnassus her Herodotus; Rhodes her Parrhasius;—nor was Athens backward to do just homage to the kindred genius of other states. She indeed could well

afford to admire and appreciate rival claims; for how brilliant are the luminaries that compose her own galaxy of genius:—Æschylus, Sophocles and Euripides, the great masters of tragic, and Aristophanes of comic art; Thucydides and Xenophon, the former the philosopher of history, uniting the powers of the orator to the penetration of the statesman, the latter a writer of such various accomplishments, that history or philosophy flow with equal ease from his pen, and whose style is so elegant, that it seems to have been woven by the Graces;* Socrates, of whom Tully has finely observed, that he evoked philosophy from the clouds, to take her place in a moral form among the familiar haunts of men; Plato, scarcely less a poet than a philosopher, the parent in Greece of sublime sentiment and lofty speculation, though often so shadowy and subtle in his views as to elude the grasp of comprehension; Aristotle, the profound naturalist and metaphysician, the acute

* The remark applied by Plato to the style of Aristophanes.

logician and critic, and the scrutinizing observer of the various forms and principles of government and legislation; Pericles and Demosthenes, those orators,

“ whose resistless eloquence
Wielded at will that fierce democracy,
Shook th' arsenal, and fulminated over Greece
To Macedon and Artaxerxes' throne.”*

In this extraordinary period, the muse of design achieved at Athens equal wonders with those of poetry and rhetoric, and tragedy was indebted to her for some of its finest embellishments. It was the happy fortune of Pericles, that his passionate desire to decorate Athens, and to render it the favourite seat of the muses and the graces, was coeval with the existence of artists, whose genius, disdaining the bonds of a slavish imitation of nature, aspired to epic grandeur of design and execution.

Among these the most illustrious was Phidias, equally distinguished as an architect and a sculptor

* Paradise Regained, book iv.

of the first order, under whom a school of design was formed, which transmitted his masterly principles of art in full vigor to the age of Alexander.

The progressive steps, by which the arts of painting and sculpture attained this dignified elevation, cannot now be accurately traced. The approaches were gradual from the age of the Pisis-tratidæ downwards; and the names of Calamis and Miron, of Polycletus and Mycon,* are recorded, as of artists who aimed at ideal grandeur of design before Phidias. But although great correctness, energy, and ease, had been attained in the delineation of the human form, much was left to be achieved in giving due effect to the varied play of the passions in the countenance, and to the high expression of mental dignity. The inspirations of poetry were now united with the most finished correctness of drawing. To use the words of a great artist in reference to this period,† “ the countenances and figures became expressive of

* Wilkenman, *Storia delle Arte*, vol. ii. p. 106; and Flaxman's *Lectures on Sculpture*.

† Do.

exalted beauty ; the action displayed the limbs and body with the greatest variety, energy, and grace ; the subjects were heroic and divine. They had a kindred spirit of sublimity with Homer, of patriotism with Tyrtæus, the noble flights of Pindar, the terrors of Æschylus, and the tenderness of Sophocles." Sculpture and poetry in this way acted and re-acted on each other. The age of their sublime achievements was one and the same. They rose and declined together. Though Painting ran an emulous career with Sculpture, its perishable materials have left us no means of descanting on the style or merits of a Panæus, or a Polygnotus ; but many portions of the existing groups of the Parthenon still attest, that the artists, who employed the chisel to imprint on marble the ardent and brilliant conceptions of creative fancy, the lofty and enchanting images of ideal beauty,* were not

* The ideal beauty which pervades some of the most exquisite of the ancient statues, is, in the spirit of Virgil's fine lines,

Os humerosque Deo similis : namque ipsa decoram
Cæsariem nato genitrix, lumenque juventæ
Purpureum, et lætos oculis afflarat honores.

less poets than those who used the more durable instrument of the pen. These compositions, in which may be traced profound learning in art, imparting decision and truth to the bright emanations of genius,—which are in the highest degree dignified, and yet so true to nature that they almost appear like human beings suddenly converted into marble in the midst of animated action,—are but a few mutilated remnants of the productions of that age of wonders. The sculpture which adorned the temple of Jupiter Olympius at Elis (chiefly the work of Phidias) appears to have been, if possible, still more poetically grand and impressive than that of the Parthenon. According to Pausanias,* it formed a splendid dramatic allegory, in which marble, ivory and gold, were all but animated into being, by the plastic touch of sublime and cultivated art.

The intellectual superiority of Athens was recognized throughout Greece. Sparta, though always ready to encounter her at the point of the sword, shrunk with conscious inferiority from col-

* Pausan. Hist. lib. v. cap. 11.

lision with her orators in public, or deliberative assemblies;* and, being incapable of rivalling her in the elegant arts, either affected to despise them, or sternly asserted the superiority of her own more rigid system.

The justice of the praises so lavishly bestowed upon Athens by Pindar,† if listened to with envy by other states, was questioned by none. This homage was the more readily conceded in consequence of the cordiality and politeness, with which strangers in general, and men of genius in particular, were welcomed at Athens. On this point Thucydides makes Pericles expatiate with much force in his celebrated funeral oration,‡ and it was so fully counted upon, that men of distinguished ability flocked thither from every part of Greece. If a poet of another state had written a tragedy,

* Thucyd. lib. iv. c. 17 ; Plut. de Gloriâ Athen.

† Pind. Pyth. vii.—

πάσαισι γὰρ πολίεσι λόγος ὁμιλεῖ

Ἐρεχθέος ἀστῶν—

et Not. ad Nem. Carm. iv. 30. ed. Heyne.

‡ Thucyd. lib. ii. cap. 39.

says Plato, he was sure to bring it to Athens for representation.*

Such were the general features of the brilliant intellectual era, in which tragedy started into being. The series of compositions which it includes, form, with a few exceptions, one of the most delightful walks in the enchanted gardens of classical literature; and at the same time that they present models of genuine pathos and of fine writing, they reflect important light on the superstitions, the prejudices, and the moral feelings of the Greeks.

Tragedy, at its first and original outset, corresponded in no degree with the idea which the word suggests to a modern ear, for it included nothing truly dramatic. Its earliest form of celebration was confined to the simple object of singing choral odes, accompanied by music and dancing, at festivals in honour of Bacchus, at the conclusion of the vintage. This custom was not confined to the rites of Bacchus, but was an expression of

* Plato, *Laches*, vol. v. p. 169, Bipont. ed.

festal gladness attendant on many of the religious ceremonies of the Greeks. As poetic contests on such occasions were not unusual, it is probable they might frequently, if not periodically, occur at the Dionysian festival, and that the custom of competing for a prize might thus, together with the chorus, have engrafted itself on tragedy.

There is reason to suppose that at these festivals recitations took place of odes very opposite in their character; the one grave and lofty, whence tragedy originated, the other of a licentious and buffo description, which formed the germ of comedy.* In all countries where the worship of Bacchus prevailed, it was strongly tinged by that spirit of licentiousness and sensuality which more or less

* Γενομένη οὖν ἀπ' ἀρχῆς αὐτόσχεδιαστικὴ. καὶ αὐτὴ (i. e. τραγωδία) καὶ ἡ κωμωδία, ἡ μὲν ἀπὸ τῶν ἐξαρχόντων τὸν διθύραμβον, ἡ δὲ ἀπὸ τῶν τὰ φαλλικά, ἃ ἔτι καὶ νῦν ἐν πολλαῖς τῶν πόλεων διαμένει νομιζόμενα, κατὰ μικρὸν ἠϋξήθη, &c.—*Arist. de Poet.* c. ix.

What he says afterwards about the Sicilian origin of comedy is too vague to demand particular notice.

disgraced the rites of Paganism, and in this respect the refined Greeks differed little from neighbouring and less polished nations.

The sacrifice of a goat to Bacchus, which formed a part of the ceremonial, is said to have given birth to the term Tragedy, τραγωδία, signifying the goat-song.

Thespis, of whom we know little more than the name, and who flourished in the age of Solon, added to the interest created by the choral songs and dances by introducing an actor, whose office it was to recite, during the pauses of the chorus, verses in honour of any favourite hero, or in celebration of some popular or ludicrous incident. The face of the actor was bedaubed with wine-lees, and the simple paraphernalia necessary to the exhibition were conveyed in a waggon, much, we presume, after the fashion of the vagrant showmen who are in the habit of frequenting our public fairs.

Ignotum Tragicæ genus invenisse Camœnæ
Dicitur, et plaustris vexisse poemata Thespis
Quæ canerent, agerentque peruncti fœcibus ora.

Hor. Art. Poet. 279.

Clemens Alexandrinus and Plutarch have introduced quotations in their works from tragedies ascribed to Thespis; but Bentley, the most learned as well as most acute of modern critics, has proved almost to demonstration, that these were forgeries by Heraclides, and that no written drama of Thespis ever existed. The same eminent critic cites the authority of the Arundel marble, to prove that the 61st Olympiad, B. C. 536, was the date of the first exhibitions of Thespis, so that there could only have been about two generations between him and the battle of Marathon.

Phrynichus is mentioned as a scholar and successor of Thespis, and from the effects ascribed by Herodotus to one of his tragedies, the subject of which was the capture of Miletus by the Persians, it would appear that he was a poet of no ordinary powers. So deeply affected, says the historian, was the auditory by the representation, that they burst into tears; but the poet, he adds, was fined a thousand drachmæ for thus vividly reminding

them of a domestic calamity, and the repetition of the piece was forbidden.*

To forbid the repetition of the piece might be sound policy, but to punish the poet for thus drawing from the eyes and hearts of the spectators the noblest homage to its power which genius can command, or desire, appears a severe enactment, especially on the very soil of taste and poetry. He was in fact achieving the triumph which Horace has described as the climax of the poetic art.†

There is no reason to suppose that Phrynichus materially advanced the art, or structure of tragedy, beyond the point at which it was left by Thespis.

Upon this simple basis, and with these imper-

* Herod. Erato. c. xxi.

† Ille per extentum funem mihi posse videtur
Ire poeta, meum qui pectus inaniter angit,
Irritat, mulcet, falsis terroribus implet,
Ut magus; et modò me Thebis, modò ponit
Athenis.

Epist. lib. ii. 210.

fect materials, Æschylus conceived and framed the regular drama—such, in the main, as it is found in the works of the greatest poets who have acquired in this career the highest reputation. He has, therefore, been justly hailed by succeeding ages, the Father of Tragic, as Homer of Epic song.

Time has spared but very scanty particulars of his life, yet, such as they are, the record of them will afford the best opportunity of detailing the special nature of the improvements which he introduced into the tragic art, as well as the peculiarities of his own genius.

Eleusis in Attica gave birth to Æschylus; according to Stanley in the 63d Olympiad, or about 525 years B.C.

His family was noble, and highly distinguished in many of its branches by the lustre of superior talents, and by eminent services rendered to their country.

A traditionary tale, recorded by Pausanias,*

* Pausanias, lib. i. cap. 21.

asserts, that when a boy he dreamt that Bacchus appeared to him while he kept guard in a vineyard, and exhorted him to devote his talents to tragic composition. Youthful enthusiasm is prolific of such forms

“ as, wove in fancy’s loom,
Float in light vision round the poet’s head.”

There is, therefore, nothing improbable in the story.

According to Suidas, he contended for, and won the tragic prize in his twenty-fifth year, in competition with Pratinas and Chærilus; but it is doubtful whether, at this early period, he had shaken off the trammels of the Thespian school.*

Pratinas was the inventor of the satiric drama,

* That the grand improvements introduced by Æschylus are to be referred to a later period, is rendered the more probable from the assertion of Aristotle, that it was *long* before tragedy rejected the trochaic tetrameter, and assumed the more dignified yet colloquial iambic, in the structure of its dialogue.

a species of burlesque tragedy, to which the Athenians were extremely partial, and of which a specimen is preserved in the Cyclops of Euripides.

The next mention of the poet is in the career of arms. He fought at Marathon under Miltiades in his thirty-fifth year, and so highly distinguished himself, as to be one of those to whom the prize of peculiar valour was assigned, after the termination of that conflict, so glorious to liberty and to Athens.

Two of his brothers, Cynægirus and Ameinias, whose bravery had been equally conspicuous, received the same honourable distinction.

He no less signalized himself in the naval action of Salamis, and in the decisive battle of Plataea. In the former of these conflicts his brother Ameinias is said to have acquired peculiar glory, by sinking the vessel of the Persian admiral.

The era which followed the defeat of Xerxes has already been designated as the brightest in the annals of Athens. Placed at the head of the

Grecian confederacy by her valour and her policy, the neighbouring maritime states became in general either her tributaries or dependants; an enlarged commerce followed, with wealth and leisure in its train, the useful and elegant arts and the severer sciences were assiduously cultivated, and Athens rose again out of the Persian ashes, at once the eye and the ornament of Greece.

It was at this period that Æschylus attained the summit of poetical reputation, and the tragic contest became under his auspices the favourite popular amusement of the Athenians.

What he achieved, has deservedly enrolled his name among the illustrious few, to whom the highest honours of genius are assigned. He invented all those prominent attributes in the structure, the spirit, and the accompaniments of tragedy, which have raised it, by the suffrages of the greatest critics, to a rank among the various productions of poetry, second only in dignity to the epopee. He not only succeeded in acting upon the feelings, and touching the passions of his auditory, by

means and for ends consistent with virtue and propriety, but he represented the very objects that he described; he invested them with suitable forms, and placed them in such a manner before the spectators, as should realise to their imaginations the images which tradition suggested of the heroes, the sages, and the deities of Grecian tradition or mythology.

Out of upwards of seventy tragedies which he composed, seven only have survived the ravages of time, so that our actual means of judging of the extent of his poetical powers are extremely limited. Among these, however, are some, the *Agamemnon*, the *Seven Chiefs*, and the *Prometheus*, that as long as they exist, will never cease to class among the finest productions of human genius. The strength and energy of fancy with which he conceived his subjects are obvious throughout these dramas. Homer himself has not more strongly individualized his Hector, his Ajax, his Achilles, than Æschylus his *Agamemnon*, his *Clytemnestra*, his *Prometheus*. The lyrical inspiration of his

choruses often approaches the sublime of Pindar, and the Greek language, nervous, comprehensive, and subtle as it is, can scarcely give full expression to the compass and energy of his thoughts and images. In pouring forth the ardent emotions of his mind, recital and narrative are often suddenly converted into picturesque delineation or bold personification. Perhaps there is no poet ancient or modern, Shakspeare and Milton alone excepted, from whose writings more striking instances might be cited of what Horace acutely styles “disjecti membra poetæ,” that is to say, the shreds of sentences, so finely expressed as to be themselves poetry. The “vermeil tinctured lip,” the “tresses like the morn,” of Milton, “the spirit-stirring drum,” “the eye-train’d bird,” “the tender leaves of hope,” of Shakspeare, are instances of this description, and may be contrasted with the *μαλθακὸν ὀμμάτων θέλος*, the *Δηξίθυμον ἔρωτος ἄνθος*, the *δορυτίνακτος αἰθὴρ ἐπιμαίνεται*, of Æschylus.

“Thoughts that breathe, and words that burn.”

Though Quintilian has dismissed Æschylus with

too slight a notice, the general suffrage of antiquity ascribed to him the highest powers of creative genius. What Aristophanes says of him shall hereafter be cited. Longinus praises in strong terms the magnificence of his imagery, and quotes, as an instance, the well-known description of the sacrifice at the commencement of the "Seven Chiefs."* The testimony of Dionysius Halicarnassensis† is as follows: Æschylus peculiarly excelled in loftiness of thought, and in a just conception of what constitutes dignity in the delineation of the passions and manners. His style is wonderfully adorned by figurative and impressive language, and he is very skilful in the invention of words and circumstances adapted to his particular purposes. Bergler quotes from an epitaph upon him by Antipater the following expressive lines.

Ο τραγικὸν φῶνημα, καὶ ὀκρυόεσσαν ἀοιδὴν
Πυργώσας στιβαρῇ πρῶτος ἐν εὐεπίῃ.

The judgment of the moderns respecting him is

* Longin. de Sub. c. xv. 5.

† Dionys. Hal. vol. ii. ed. Hudson, 69.

precisely similar. To use the language of a great poet and able critic*—"At his summons, the mysterious and tremendous volume of destiny, in which are inscribed the doom of gods and men, seemed to display its leaves of iron before the appalled spectators; the more than mortal voices of deities, Titans, and departed heroes, were heard in awful conference; Olympus bowed, and its deities descended; earth yawned and gave up the pale spectres of the dead and the yet more undefined and grisly forms of those infernal deities who struck horror into the gods themselves. All this could only be dared and done by a poet of the highest order, confident, during that early age of enthusiasm, that he addressed an audience prompt to kindle at the heroic scene which he placed before them. It followed almost naturally, from his character, that the dramas of Æschylus, though full of terrible interest, should be deficient in grace and softness; that his sublime conciseness

* Sir Walter Scott's Essay on the Drama.

should deviate sometimes into harshness and obscurity; and that his plots should appear rude and inartificial, contrasted with those of his successors in the dramatic art. Still, however, Æschylus led not only the way in the noble career of the Grecian drama, but outstripped, in point of sublimity at least, those by whom he was followed."

The term "theatre" suggests to a modern ear the idea of a building devoted to nocturnal amusement, blazing with the splendor of innumerable lights, and replete with objects of the highest excitement.

These ideas must either be dismissed, or modified, in order to form a just notion of the "theatres" of the Greeks. They were open to the skies; the representations took place in broad daylight;* and, from considerations of propriety, no female actors were allowed.

Occasional annoyance must have been experienced from sudden changes of the weather, or

* Barnesii Tract. de Tragœd.

from radiant sunshine; but these were possibly guarded against by contrivances which are not mentioned,* or an occasional interruption was deemed by the spectators of little moment, in comparison of the general delight of inhaling the pure air, and being fanned by the soft breezes of their delicious climate. Again, the modern theatre is a scene solely devoted to pleasure. Nobody goes there with the idea of receiving positive instruction. But tragic representation among the Greeks was a species of religious ceremonial, and, as compared with that of later times, might almost be termed a school of divinity. It commenced with sacrifice,† and the professed aim of its poets was to render amusement subordinate to moral instruction. Aristotle expressly contends for this principle,‡ and Æschylus is made, by Aristophanes, to rebuke Euripides severely for its occasional violation.

* Barnesii Tract. de Tragœd.

† Plutarch in Cimone.

‡ Aristot. de Poet. c. 7.

§ Aristoph. Rand. 1043.

We will say nothing in this place about the errors of heathen morality, or the grossness of heathen superstition, even in their best forms. We only assert the fact, that the aim was thus noble, however imperfect the execution. Hence Milton, who, with the exception of the finer tragedies of Shakspeare,* justly regarded the modern, in its moral character, as a degenerated scion of the ancient drama, thus expresses himself with regard to the Greek school.

“ Tragedy, as it was anciently composed, hath been ever held the gravest, moralest, and most profitable of all other poems, therefore said by Aristotle to be of power, by raising pity and fear, or terror, to purge the mind of these and such like passions, that is, to temper and reduce them to just measure, with a kind of delight, stirred up by reading or seeing those passions well imitated.

* After alluding, in *Il Penseroso*, to the pensive grandeur of Ancient Tragedy, he adds,

And what *tho' rare*, of later age,
Ennobled hath the buskined stage.

“ Hence philosophers, and other gravest writers, as Cicero, Plutarch, and others, frequently cite out of tragic poets, both to adorn and illustrate their discourse.

“ This is mentioned, to vindicate tragedy from the small esteem, or rather infamy, which, in the account of many, it undergoes at this day, with other common interludes.”

Milton, in composing Tragedy, strictly adhered to the ancient models, and the *Samson Agonistes*, though defective in dramatic action, is a noble monument of his successful rivalry of their style and spirit.

Tragedy, under Thespis, it has already been said, was nothing more than the recitation, by a single actor, of the exploits or adventures of some real or fabulous hero or heroes, which relieved, at intervals, the monotony of the chorus. By the introduction of two, and, occasionally, of more persons of the drama,* and by assigning to each a

* It has been a favourite hypothesis with writers on the ancient drama, that Sophocles was the first

distinct part, Æschylus gave the representation of a varied and continuous action, accompanied by all the animation of dialogue, and excitive of those peculiar emotions which the semblance of reality produces on the imagination. The illusion of appropriate, though not moveable scenery was added, in giving effect to which the poet availed himself of the assistance of distinguished artists. In this particular Sophocles, according to Aristotle, greatly improved upon the inventions of his predecessor, yet it is obvious that the machinery

person who introduced a third actor. But a little reflection on the incidents of the *Agamemnon*, renders it next to certain that three, at least, were occasionally resorted to by Æschylus. How could it be otherwise, for instance, where Agamemnon presents Cassandra to Clytemnestra, and commends her to her kindness? On this point the authority of Bentley may be regarded as conclusive. Æschylus (he says) is generally reported as the inventor of the second actor; and yet several believed that afterwards he invented, too, the third actor; for, in the making of seventy-five tragedies, he had time enough to improve further upon his first model.—*Bentley's Phalaris*, p. 240.

necessary to give effect to some of the scenes in the existing dramas of Æschylus, required no ordinary degree of ingenuity and invention. The Prometheus, for example, demanded considerable exertion both of pictorial and mechanical skill. The eye of the spectator was to rest upon the scenery of a savage and rocky eminence on the bosom of the trackless deep, to which the giant rebel was chained: the chorus of sea nymphs, who visit and condole with him, were introduced as if wafted in a winged chariot; and old Oceanus, who followed them, made his entrée on what seemed a flying steed, or, as the scholiast will have it, a griffin. These particulars are not merely to be inferred from the incidents of the piece, but are confirmed by the authority of Aristophanes, who alludes in the "Frogs" with much humour to the introduction, by Æschylus, of these and similar mysterious beings in his dramas.* Agatharcus, a painter, is

* Aristoph. *Ranæ*, 960 and 1320. Ed. Burmanni.

mentioned by Vitruvius as having rendered the poet important aid in these contrivances.*

The ancient tragedies were not usually thus fraught with the marvellous, and the requisite scenery was extremely simple. The outside of a temple, a mansion, or a palace, or the interior court of either, sufficed for the greater part of the incidents introduced into these compositions. The privacy in which the Greek women lived, forbade the representation of the interior apartments of houses, and thus excluded from the ancient drama those scenes of amatory intrigue, which supply the modern stage with so much dangerous, and often pernicious excitement.

Much taste was displayed by Æschylus in the drapery of his performers, which, according to Athenæus,† was arranged with such elegance, and at the same time with such attention to propriety, as to have furnished models for improving the habits of the ministers of religion. Vulgarity and

* Vitruvius, Præf. lib. vii.

† Athen. Casaub. lib. i. c. 18.

grossness had probably marked their gait and attire under Thespis. Horace alludes to this reform, and to the general dignity now impressed upon tragedy :

Post hunc personæ, pallæque repertor honestæ,
 Æschylus, et modicis instravit pulpita tignis
 Et docuit magnumque loqui, nitique cothurno.

The costume of the deities whom he introduced was conformed either to some conventional model, or was borrowed from that of the most decorous and appropriate of their respective statues.

His actors were elevated much above the natural stature by lofty buskins, and they wore sculptured or painted masks, adapted to the characters whom they represented.

These were probably a little rude in their execution in the first instance, but they acquired, as the fine arts advanced towards perfection, a high degree of finish and expression.

They were shifted as the progress of the action required a change of expression, and they were so constructed as to aid the powers of the voice.

Many imitations of these masks exist in collections of ancient sculpture and painting, and justify the opinion that the talents of the first artists of Athens were employed to give to the originals the most exquisite traits of feature and character. The use of such an expedient can only be accounted for, or defended, by a reference to the customs of the Greeks, and to the magnitude of their theatres.

It has already been stated, that no female performers were allowed on the stage of Greece, consequently, feminine beauty, grace, and dignity, could only be imitated by the use of masks.

From the vast circumference of their theatres, the majority of the spectators were placed at such a distance from the stage, that few would have been able to trace the varying expression of impassioned sentiment or feeling in the countenances of the performers themselves, whereas the strong relief of the mask conveyed the ideal semblance of each distinct personage; a circumstance which afforded a latitude and power to the dramatic art far more extended than if the same individual face

had been employed to represent a great variety of characters and emotions. The delusion of the masks and of the scene was also heightened from the distance whence they were surveyed.

The general aim was, that the actors, by appropriate beauty of drapery or armour, by dignity or grace of form and manner, and by lofty declamation, should communicate to the spectators the same sentiment of ideal grandeur which so peculiarly pervades the language and the incidents of Grecian tragedy, and thus realize to them in every way the images which fancy suggested of the heroic ages. To this end, mechanical means were employed to diffuse, or circumscribe the light, at pleasure, over the stage and the orchestra, as the blaze of broad daylight, by robbing the artificial appendages of all mystery, and bringing them into too close a comparison with the truth of nature, would have been fatal to their effect. The actors thus circumstanced, must have appeared, throughout the changing scenes, like so many successive groups of animated and breathing sculpture, an art, with

which, as it existed in the age of Pericles, Grecian tragedy has often and justly been compared.

The first theatre at Athens was a rude fabric of wood, and was burnt down in the time of Pratinas,* already alluded to as the inventor of the satyric drama. The succeeding building was probably erected under the auspices of Æschylus, and adapted to his improvements and inventions in the tragic art; but it was either totally rebuilt, or greatly enlarged by Pericles, when it assumed, it is supposed, a magnificence adapted to that age of luxury and embellishment. The general form, and some portions of the masonry of this fabric are still discoverable at Athens, and bear the appellation of the theatre of Bacchus. In it the chef-d'œuvres of Sophocles and Euripides were represented. A passage from the Symposium of Plato† has frequently been cited, to prove that its

* Suidas in Pratinas.

† Plat. Op. Symp. vol. x. p. 172. Ed. Bipont. The words are ἤγε παρα σὲ νέεσ' ὄντος οὕτω σφόδρα ἐξέλαμψε

dimensions were so vast as to be capable of accommodating more than thirty thousand spectators, but there is good reason to regard this assertion as hyperbolical. The mode, in fact, of its introduction, in no degree entitles it to be regarded as an historical statement. Agatho, one of the guests supposed to be present at the "Symposium," had recently obtained the tragic garland; and to him Socrates addresses the flattering remark that his fame had been brilliantly displayed on that occasion in the presence of more than thirty thousand of the Greeks. As the charm of the compliment would obviously be heightened by an exaggeration of the numbers, the philosopher may naturally be conjectured to have spoken largely; but this supposition is rendered almost matter of fact by the result of scientific modern measurements of the remains of the principal Greek theatres, for the most capacious among them, which appear to have

καὶ ἐκφανὴς ἐγένετο πρῶην ἐν μάρτυσι τῶν Ἑλλήνων
πλέον ἢ τρισμύριοις.

equalled in dimensions that of Athens, could not have contained, even when crowded, more than *twenty* thousand spectators.*

The beautiful situation occupied by the remains of many of the ancient theatres justifies the supposition, that they were studiously placed so as to command, and to incorporate with their own architectural features, the finest objects of the adjacent country. The majestic mountains, and luxuriant plains, the groves, and gardens, the land-locked and open sea, in the neighbourhood of many of the principal cities of Greece, presented the finest materials which taste could suggest or desire, for such combinations. But the charm of Southern landscape depends not solely on the romantic or beautiful features which enter into its composition. In that land of the Sun, the purity of the atmosphere, the rich and magical hues of colour, the soft loveliness of the aerial perspective, the powerful relief of light and shadow, produce on the

* Mr. Cockerell is the Author's authority for the above statement.

senses, while contemplating the beauties of Nature, impressions of pleasure rarely equalled even on our finest days in these Northern regions.

“ Where’er we gaze, around, above, below,
What rainbow tints, what magic charms are found,
Rocks, river, forest, mountain all abound !
And bluest skies to harmonize the whole.”

Childe Harold.

Select portions of landscapes thus composed and coloured, viewed through the openings of a fine architectural building, must have feasted the eye with living pictures of exquisite grace and beauty.

The theatre of Taurominium, in Sicily, was so placed, that the audience had a fine view of Ætna, in the back ground of the distance. That of Athens comprehended the various declivities of Mount Hymettus, and overlooked the Saronic gulf, and the emporium of Piræus, with its three ports. Above it towered the Acropolis, crowned by the majestic Parthenon. In point of situation, therefore, it must have been perfect, and in beauty, it

is said by Dichæarchus,* a writer of the age of Demetrius Phalereus, or about 310 B.C., to have transcended all similar buildings.

In shape the ancient theatres were not unlike that of a horse-shoe. The seats of the spectators consisted of steps, ranging one above another, round the segment of nearly three-fourths of a circle, which this shape supposes. The lower seats belonged to persons of quality and to magistrates, the middle to the commonalty, and the upper are said to have been appropriated to females.† It has, however, been questioned whether they frequented the theatre. That they did not attend comic spectacles, in the time of Aristophanes, Schlegel has pretty clearly proved; but that they

* Leake's Athens, p. 58. The same learned writer has given an engraving of an ancient Athenian coin which illustrates the above particulars. It represents the great Athenian theatre viewed from below. Above it rises the wall of the Acropolis, over the centre of which towers the Parthenon, and to the left is the Propylæa.

† Potter's Archæologia, vol. i. p. 42.

were present at tragedies may be inferred from an anecdote, hereafter mentioned, connected with the representation of the Eumenides of Æschylus, which could not otherwise have obtained the slightest credit.

Scalæ, or flights of steps, diverging in equidistant radii from the bottom to the top, formed the communications with the seats.

What is called in modern theatres the Pit, was termed the orchestra, though relatively much contracted, and was occupied by the chorus, a band of performers whose function it was to recite or sing the lyrical compositions or odes which occurred between the different acts of the piece.

In the centre of the orchestra, and on a level with the stage, was an altar, called Thymele,* on which sacrifice was offered before the tragic contests commenced: there were steps round it, on

* Suidas in Σκηνή says—ἔστι μετα την ὀρχηστραν βωμὸς τῷ Διονύσῳ, ὃς καλεῖται θυμελή· παρὰ τὸ θύειν.—Vid. et. Jul. Pollux, lib. iv. 123, Eurip. Ion. 161, et Plut. in Cimone.

which the chorus stood when they joined in the dialogue of the actors.

Though there is great difficulty in reconciling and in reducing to clearness many of the assertions of Julius Pollux, Vitruvius, and other ancient authors respecting the parts which composed the scene and the stage of the Greek theatre, it is hoped that the following statement may reflect some light upon this subject, so interesting to classical scholars, and which has been so much agitated by antiquaries.

The scene, Σκηνή, was a solid architectural building of considerable elevation, presenting a highly ornamental façade, with three principal and two minor gateways.* It was often decorated with costly columns and statues, and to it were suspended such painted and moveable scenes as the piece to be represented might require.† In front was a permanent stage, a portion of which was covered

* Julius Pollux, iv. 124, et Vitruvius, lib. .

† κατα βλήματα δὲ ὑφάσματα, ἢ πίνακες ἦσαν, ἔχοντες γραφὰς, τῇ χρείᾳ τῶν δραμάτων.—*Julius Pollux*, iv. 131.

by a temporary roof or awning, which served to conceal the mechanism of the scenery, and to suspend the αὔλαια, or curtain. This was termed the proscenium. The stage on which the actors stood, called λογεῖον, and in Latin pulpitum, occupied the width of the orchestra, and was placed in front of the permanent stage. Its shape was varied according to the purposes of the representation, and it was moveable.*

Vitruvius has described, with much detail, vases of brass and sometimes of pottery placed under the seats or precincts of the theatre to promote the transmission of sound :* it may be inferred from his description that the aid they rendered was important, but this portion of his work has never been sufficiently understood to allow of its application to the construction of any modern buildings ; nor, except at Scythopolis in Syria, have the smallest traces of them been found in the remains of ancient theatres.† If the facts he states are authentic, it

* Vitruvius, lib. 5.

† Mr. Cockerell, who unites an accurate knowledge

must follow that the moderns are much behind the ancients in the science of acoustics.

The ancient theatres were not only used for scenical representations, but for contests in music and in other departments of genius or of skill. Various festivals,* and not unfrequently political assemblies, were also held in them. That of Megalopolis is supposed to have been constructed of larger dimensions than would otherwise have been requisite, in order to accommodate the great Arcadian council.† At Athens the assemblies of the people were originally held in the Pnyx, a place of concourse venerable from its antiquity, and interesting from its associations with the noblest

of what the classical writers have said of the theatre of Greece to an intimate acquaintance with its architecture acquired during his travels in that country, has favoured me, in reply to various inquiries which I put to him on this subject, with an answer so calculated to clear up its difficulties, that, with his permission, I have printed it in an Appendix to this volume.

* Demosthenes in Meidiam. Ed. Tylor, p. 106.

† Leake's Morea, vol. ii. 40.

recollections of her history ; but towards the close of the Pelopponesian war, they more frequently took place in the theatre of Bacchus.* In the age of Philip and Alexander the custom had become frequent at Athens of honouring with a crown of gold any citizens who had rendered signal services to their country, and on such occasions proclamation was made in the theatre during the grand festival of Bacchus, when the new tragedies were exhibited, and the throng of strangers as well as of citizens was great, of the name and merits of the individual thus highly honored. The rival orations of Demosthenes and Æschines, *de Coronâ*, are fraught with allusions to the custom.

Æschylus not unfrequently acted a part in his own dramas, and animated the performers by his example and instructions. He skilfully adapted the embellishments of the chorus to the incidents of the piece, though in this respect he sometimes overstepped, through the fervour of his fancy,

* Thucyd. lib. viii. 92.

the bounds of propriety. An example of this description occurred, it is said, at the representation of the *Eumenides*, a drama still extant, in which Orestes, after taking vengeance on his mother for the murder of his father, is represented as haunted and pursued by the furies. These infernal deities were introduced upon the stage, their hair braided with serpents, torches and other emblems of terror in their hands, and accompanied by a numerous train of kindred attendants, when the effects produced by fear upon some of the females and children of the auditory were such, that the magistrates interfered, and restricted, by a legislative enactment, the number of the chorus to thirty. It was afterwards reduced to fifteen. An extravagance, akin to that which has just been noticed, occasionally marked the action of his dramas. He has been ridiculed by Aristophanes for placing and retaining on the stage, through the successive periods of a long action, mute personages, who, after sustaining this part till towards the close, broke forth into one or two piercing exclamations, and then disappeared. Thus

Achilles,* after the death of Patroclus, and Niobe, after that of her daughters, were introduced in two of his tragedies, with their heads veiled, and fixed in speechless grief till the conclusion of the drama.

Whether the dialogue of tragedy was delivered in a tone of appropriate declamation, or in a style of impressive recitative, regulated by an accompaniment of the flute or pipe, has been a subject of much learned discussion. It is clear from the testimony of Horace, that the colloquy of Roman tragedy proceeded in the latter way; and Burney, in his History of Music, has adduced various passages from Aristotle and Plutarch, to prove the same of that of Greece. Schlegel, on the other hand, opposes the inferences drawn from those passages. They are in fact of very ambiguous import, and at the utmost afford nothing beyond a plausible colouring to the hypothesis. The colloquial though dignified style of the Grecian drama, its fidelity to nature, its simplicity and pathos, ap-

* *πρώτιστα μὲν γὰρ δὴ γ' ἓνα τίν' ἐκάθισεν ἐγκαλυψας,
 Ἀχιλλέα τίν', ἢ, Νιόβην, τὸ πρόσωπον οὐχὶ δεικνὺς,
 πρόσχημα τῆς τραγωδίας, γρύζοντας εὐδὲ τουτὶ.*

pear directly opposed to the supposition of a highly artificial mode of delivery; yet a measured and impressive recitation, and an elevated tone of voice, must have been essential to the due transmission of sound over a vast area; and some slight musical accompaniment to regulate the pitch of the voice would not be at variance with an easy yet lofty style of declamation.

Under Thespis and his immediate successors little or no relation appears to have existed between the subjects of the chorus and that of the accompanying monologues. The latter had merely been introduced as episodes or interludes between the pauses of the chorus. The case was now exactly reversed; the dialogue formed the main body of the piece, and the chorus became no more than an interlude. The choral songs formed in their subject an impressive comment on the incidents of the drama, giving utterance in sage and solemn strains to the moral or religious sentiments, or to the patriotic emotions which it was supposed the passing scene ought to excite in the spectators.*

* Arist. de Poet. c. x. 26.

It has been said, in allusion to the lofty style and the lyrical inspiration of these compositions, that if in ancient tragedy the performers spoke the language of heroes and kings, they spoke in the choruses the language of the gods.

The place occupied by the chorus, and the number to which it was restricted, have already been adverted to.

The individuals composing it represented any character that best suited the purpose of the drama, whether it required that they should personate a band of aged men, or of sage matrons, or of priests, or virgins, or of attendants on festal mirth or funeral solemnity.

While singing or reciting the part assigned them, they danced in time to the measure and cadence of music, in bands of equal number, moving from right to left as they repeated the choral strophe, then back from left to right during the antistrophe, and facing the spectators as they recited the epode.

The style of the dances was grave or lively,

according to the nature of the poetry which they accompanied. Indelicate movements or gestures are expressly reprobated by Aristotle, as totally at variance with the moral character of tragedy.* Some idea may be formed of the skill with which the dancing was accommodated to the subject from the testimony of the same author, as quoted by Athenæus,† who states that Telestes, a performer in the Seven Chiefs of Thebes, was so accomplished in this particular, that the course of the action was perfectly expressed by his movements.

The musical instruments which served as an accompaniment to the voices of the chorus were few and simple. As the poetry directly related to the incidents of the piece, to which it served as an explanation or comment, it required distinct articulation; consequently, the music was not to overwhelm the voices of the singers. The flute, the pipe, and the lyre, the instruments almost ex-

* Arist. de Poet. c. xviii.

† Athen. lib. i. c. xviii.

clusively used, were precisely of this character. Yet in martial choruses, such as those of the Seven Chiefs, the occasional introduction of the trumpet was probably permitted.

Of the wonderful effects produced by modern orchestras in giving to the compositions of the poet the united aid of exquisite singing and music, in the most complex, yet most harmonious combination, and with a power that electrifies and astonishes even unscientific ears, the Greeks appear to have known nothing. Yet, after all, what combinations of this description can touch the feelings like the tones of the human voice with a simple accompaniment, provided those tones be of a very fine quality. Here lay the true source, it is probable, of that wonderful power ascribed to Grecian music in melting, or exciting the passions. In this way Demodocus in Homer draws tears from the eyes of Ulysses.* The early attention which the Greeks paid to vocal, no less than to

* Odyss. lib. viii. 86.

musical science, their high degree of natural taste, and the favourable influence of their exquisite climate, conspired to give to the human voice among them, a compass, a sweetness, and a flexibility, unknown in countries less polished, or more distant from the sun.

The culture of musical science, the study of dialectics, and the exercises of the palæstra, formed the prominent features of education at Athens in her best days. Anaxagoras introduced there a taste for philosophical speculation; and, under his instructions, Pericles, it is said, acquired that dignified and polished style of rhetoric of which he was the first who set his countrymen the example. In what way music was rendered by the Greeks subservient to moral discipline is not very intelligibly explained, though it is strongly asserted by their greatest philosophers. Pythagoras delighted in its study, and inculcated it on his disciples. Plato ascribes much of the growing degeneracy of his countrymen to their abandonment of the simple, severe, and grave character of the ancient music,

for a style effeminate and sensual. Similar complaints are made by Aristotle. In all the principal schools of philosophy music was cultivated, and innumerable treatises on it emanated from them.

“ go, view
The schools of ancient sages : his who bred
Great Alexander to subdue the world.
Lyceum there, and painted Stoa next :
There thou shalt hear and learn the secret power
Of harmony in tones and numbers hit,
By voice or hand, and various-measured verse,
Æolian charms and Dorian lyric odes.”

Par. Reg. book iv.

There is a curious passage in Thucydides, in which he states that the Spartan troops were carefully taught to march upon their enemies to the measured sound of flutes or pipes, which not only animated their courage, but was specially designed to regulate the movement of their limbs, and to restrain within due bounds their natural impetuosity.*

Polybius has recorded some very curious de-

* Thucyd. lib. v. 70.

tails of the musical education of the Arcadians, and particular instances are related of Solon, of Terpander, and of Timotheus, in which, by accompanying impassioned strains of poetry with the lyre, or the flute, they produced an overpowering influence on illustrious individuals or on large auditories.

The expense of getting up the chorus was considerable. It was defrayed by the government for every poet whose piece, after undergoing the scrutiny of appointed judges, was deemed worthy of being admitted to the tragic contest. Great pains were taken, by diligent rehearsals, to prepare the performers for an able discharge of their allotted functions. Athenæus records an instance in which Sophocles sung to the music of his lyre in the chorus of one of his own tragedies.*

However deep was the interest which the Greeks took in the dialogue of tragedy, the chorus appears to have been their peculiar delight. Its lyrical

* Athen. lib. i. c. xvii.

inspiration, the rhythm of the verse, its thrilling appeals to their patriotic or religious feelings, the mystic solemnity of its dances, and its musical attractions, styled by Aristotle the principal embellishment of tragedy, sufficiently account for this preference.*

To native Greeks, enthusiastically alive to these various attractions, and intimately acquainted with the traditions or customs, whence originated numberless allusions unintelligible to the acutest modern scholars, the time occupied by the chorus was a sort of continued enchantment. To the modern student indeed, who is embarrassed by its difficulties of construction, and the obscurity of its allusions, who surveys it stripped of its appropriate embellishments, and who can at best but imperfectly appreciate the grace and harmony, the swell and pomp, of its high-sounding lays, it is apt to

* καὶ ὅτι οὐ μικρὸν μέρος τὴν μουσικὴν καὶ τὴν ὄψιν ἔχει, δι' ἧς τὰς ἡδονὰς ἐπίστανται ἐναργέστατα.—*Arist. de Poet.* c. xviii.

appear a tedious suspension in the development of the plot, an unnatural separation between kindred portions of the dialogue. Nor can it be denied that in the case of Æschylus it often swelled into prolixity, since its restriction within narrower bounds is one of the improvements ascribed by the ancient critics themselves to his successors. But to do real justice to the chorus, the critic must forget himself and the modern world, and realise as nearly as possible the feelings, the prejudices, and the tastes of an ancient Greek; he must reflect on the variety and the perfection of its various embellishments: what he has felt or thought in his closet, with his lexicon on one side and Hermannus de Metris on the other, after some severe hours spent in combating the knotty difficulties of a chorus, ought, if possible, to be altogether discarded from his memory.

What poetry to English ears can sound more musically harmonious, for instance, than the choral parts of Milton's *Comus*? Were the English to become a dead language, and a foreign student to

occupy himself with those compositions after a lapse of many centuries of ignorance and barbarism had clouded over the meaning of their local or learned allusions, and, by introducing a false pronunciation, had broken the spell of their harmony, or dissolved the charm of "their linked sweetness long drawn out," what a different judgment would he probably pass upon them from that which a correct knowledge of all these particulars now produces.

It will be obvious from the preceding statement that the chorus, with its various accompaniments, formed the striking peculiarity of the ancient as opposed to modern tragedy. The subjects, moreover, round which the former revolved, being principally derived from poetic history and marvellous tradition, imparted to it a mien and port peculiarly stately, corresponding to the expressive touches of Milton's portraiture :

" Sometimes let gorgeous Tragedy
In sceptred pall come sweeping by,
Presenting Thebes or Pelops' line,
Or the tale of Troy divine.

This restriction of subjects was a necessary consequence of the circumstances in which Greece was at this time placed—isolated by superior refinement from the rest of the world, confined therefore to her own resources, and only just beginning to be enriched with the expanding treasures of authentic history. Considering how similar, nay, often, how identical, are the subjects of the three great tragedians, we cannot but admire the richness of invention, and the ingenuity, displayed in the variety of their treatment.

Occasionally the persons composing the choral band descended from the heights of Empyrean poetry, and took part in the dialogue itself, by means of their *κορυφαῖος* (Coryphæus) or leader. He spoke according to circumstances, either as a single person, or for the whole band, or aided the progress of the action by brief explanations, or uttered expressions of pity for suffering virtue, or in condemnation of crime or impiety. At such times the choral band advanced to the front of the

orchestra, so as to be brought within the sphere of the action.

The style of speaking and sentiment, to which the chorus is confined when thus passing the limits of its more official functions, proves that the expedient of the Coryphæus was resorted to only when circumstances called for remarks, or explanations, which could not properly proceed from the persons of the drama. Nothing in fact can be more tame or puerile than the style of speaking to which he is restricted. Father Brumoy, in allusion to it, calls him, with laughable quaintness, "*l'honnête homme de la pièce.*"

When the incidents that elicited these commonplace remarks were of a nature to excite the strongest emotions of terror or pity, of surprise or admiration, there must have been something extremely ludicrous in the contrast between the feelings of the spectators, and the cold truisms quaintly uttered by the chorus. These and similar absurdities were a necessary consequence of that law of

Grecian tragedy, which permitted not the chorus to quit the theatre throughout the progress of the drama, and yet never allowed of their active intervention. They were consequently auditors of all supposed soliloquies, privy to all plots, spectators of all impending dangers, and at the same time condemned to passive quiescence.

Sir Walter Scott, in his *Essay on the Drama*, has placed this portion of our subject in so humorous a light, that we must indulge in a quotation.

“ When a deed of violence was to be acted, the helpless chorus, instead of interfering to prevent the atrocity to which the perpetrator had made them privy, could only, by the rules of the theatre, exhaust their sorrow and surprise in dithyrambics. This was well ridiculed by Bentley in his farce called the “ *Wishes*,” in one part of which strange performance he introduced a chorus after the manner of the ancient Greeks, who are informed by one of the *dramatis personæ*, that a madman with a firebrand has just entered the vaults beneath the

place which they occupy, and which contains a magazine of gunpowder. The chorus, instead of stirring from the dangerous vicinity, immediately commence a long complaint of the hardship of their fate, exclaiming pathetically—‘ Oh ! unhappy madman—or rather unhappy we the victims of this madman’s fury—or thrice, thrice unhappy the friends of the madman, who did not secure him and restrain him from the perpetration of such deeds of frenzy—or three and four times hapless the keeper of the magazine who forgot the keys in the door ! ’ ”

The above is of course a humorous caricature of the extra-official functions of the chorus, yet many instances might be pointed out of the complete apathy with which they are made to survey scenes of crime, or danger, or terror, which would almost justify a literal application of the satire.

Before the subject of the chorus is dismissed, the light which it reflects on the religious and moral opinions of the Greeks deserves to be adverted to.

The mystic lore of Pythagoras, the lofty speculations of Plato, the logical subtleties of the schools, were for the philosophical few. The tragic poet was to arouse or touch the feelings of the multitude of Athens: he therefore selected those topics to which the understandings and the hearts of his auditors would most surely and sympathetically respond. A tone of ideal grandeur, it is true, was diffused over his characters, and pervaded his sentiments; yet not in such a degree as wholly to lift them out of the sphere of ordinary humanity. Making, therefore, due allowance for the exaggeration of poetry, we may derive from these dramatic writers a tolerably correct idea of the moral resources of their countrymen, under the pressure of the sorrows and trials inevitable to humanity.

It is impossible to peruse the choruses of *Æschylus* without acknowledging that his moral aim was lofty, and that, according to his imperfect light, his piety was sincere. Reverence for the gods—respect for the sanctity of an oath, and of

the conjugal tie—inflexible justice—moderation in prosperity—patience under sufferings—devoted love to our country—generous hospitality;—these are the moral principles which he inculcates, and to which his countrymen, however defective their practice, listened with applause.

Nothing that is licentious or impure stains his pages, or leaves it doubtful, as in the case of Euripides, whether the parade of morality, rather than a real moral feeling, inspired the apparent indignation with which he lashes vice or impiety, or does homage to suffering virtue.

It is interesting to trace in these particulars a verification of the scriptural assertion, that even among the Heathen “God left not himself without witness;” for we clearly recognise in these choral strains, no less than in the principal schools of Grecian philosophy, the power of conscience, the restless stirrings of the immortal mind, and a clear perception of the essential difference between vice and virtue.

Where then does the poet fail? He fails, in the

first place, by that meagre, imperfect knowledge of the depth and extent of moral obligation, which is obvious in every system of Pagan ethics; but he particularly fails, where Heathens or Deists ever must, in the attempt to fortify even the moral principles for which they do contend, by sanctions practically efficacious. How could it be otherwise? In the absence of the light of Revelation there can be no certain knowledge of the nature of the true God, and therefore no unhesitating appeal to the authority of a Supreme Ruler, infinite in wisdom and power, in justice and mercy, whose will, emanating from these perfections, forms the necessary and eternal rule of right and wrong. Neither can there be any but glimmering notions of a future life and a future judgment, the certainty of which invests the precepts of Christianity with such awful force and such controlling influence.

A settled darkness rested on the religious horizon of the great mass of the Heathen world, from the confounding influence of the follies and crimes which their mythology ascribed to the gods whom

they adored;* and even their philosophers, many of whom soared above these vulgar superstitions, were staggered on the very threshold of inquiry by their inability to reconcile the origin and prevalence of moral evil with any satisfactory notions of the divine justice and benevolence.

Why Sin and Evil were permitted to enter into the world, and mar the works of a Being to whose perfections they are infinitely opposed, is a

* How the vices ascribed to the gods operated on morals, is keenly illustrated in numberless passages of the dialogues of Lucian, a writer, who, though belonging to the later periods of Grecian literature, thought and composed, as it has been justly observed, in the spirit of the age of Pericles. Aristophanes often touches with caustic force on the same subject: thus in the *Clouds*, as translated by Cumberland—

Adicæol. What is justice?

There's no such thing—I traverse your appeal.

Dicæol. How, no such thing as justice?

Adicæol. No: where is it?

Dicæol. With the immortal gods.

Adicæol. If it be there,

How chanced it Jupiter himself escaped

For his unnatural deeds to his own father?

question, which, though partially cleared up by the light of Revelation, is in many of its relations beyond the grasp of human intelligence. Even the most obvious phenomena of nature are a mystery to man the moment that he attempts to penetrate their final causes. To a capacity so limited, the secret counsels of the Great Eternal, and the stupendous scheme of his moral government of the universe, embracing, as it probably may, the relations of past, present, and to come, must consequently, in a transcendently higher degree, prove an unfathomable depth. It is enough for man to know that the nature of that Almighty Being is essential Truth and Goodness; that Evil originated in rebellious opposition to his holy will, and shall finally exist only in its penal consequences. Revelation, though it repels the searchings of vain curiosity, illustrates these particulars, so essential to human happiness and to moral ends, with a plenitude of light. In the great scheme of Redemption, in particular, it opens to the eye of Faith such refulgent manifestations of the love of God to a lapsed world, and such bright prospects of the immortal felicity which awaits his faithful servants, as ought to dispel every shade of doubt,

and all anxiety but that of pleasing Him “in whose favour is life,” “and at whose right hand are pleasures for evermore.” In the absence of this celestial light, the most fanciful expedients were resorted to for cutting the knot, which it was found impossible to unloose. Hence, throughout the East, the Magian hypothesis of two eternal, supreme, and conflicting Principles—the one evil, the other good, each of whom was to be worshipped and propitiated. Hence, among the Grecian poets, especially the tragedians, the ascription of Supreme power to a blind Destiny, of which gods and men were more or less the victims. Nothing in their Olympus like stability, nothing like eternity is to be found. The throne of Jupiter himself was founded on the ruins of the dynasties of a race of elder gods, and he is represented as harassed by fears lest Destiny had decreed the subversion of his own. *Æschylus* propounds this doctrine in the *Prometheus*; it occurs in *Homer*; and *Lucian*, in later times, made it in his dialogues the subject of his caustic irony and wit. How merry in his pages is *Momus* at the expense of the father of the gods, whom he represents as a limited being, subject in all respects to the blind and inscrutable decrees of Fate!

On this same principle, persons eminent for the very virtues which these writers most enforced, are represented as liable to become, by the decrees of Destiny, miserable victims of uncontrollable misfortunes, unwilling perpetrators of dreadful crimes.

It was Destiny, or Necessity, (another word for it,) which stifled in the bosom of Agamemnon the feelings of a father when he sacrificed Iphigineia at the bloody shrine of Diana. It was Destiny that guided the steel of Orestes to the breast of his guilty mother, and yet left him, in punishment of the parricidal act, to be haunted and maddened by the Furies. Even Clytemnestra palliates her guilt by the plea, that a relentless demon, the instigator of the crimes of the house of Atreus, had irresistibly acted on her will. The sacrifice of black cattle to Infernal Jupiter, to Night, and to the Furies, originated in these bewildering views, which supposed the existence of an undefinable, but supreme power, inimical to human happiness.

Under the withering influence of such a system,

what moral virtues could fairly expand, what hope could cheer or animate afflicted humanity, or suffering virtue? Yet there are not wanting modern writers of eminent popularity, who, in contrasting the features of Grecian Paganism with Christianity, have painted the former as joyous, festive, and attractive, the latter as gloomy, melancholy and repulsive.

What is called the gloom and severity of Christianity, is but the discipline necessary to restore a fallen creature to his original dignity and happiness.

What is called the joyousness of Heathenism, is but a set of expedients to drown present reflection, and to strew with flowers the path of moral corruption, and ultimate misery.

From these remarks, produced by the theological and moral strains of the chorus, we return to the more immediate tenor of our subject.

The tragic contests principally took place at the great festival of Bacchus, in part of March and April. Athens was then crowded with strangers,

anxious to view these "dramatic Olympia," and with deputies from her dependancies, who came to pay into her treasury their annual tribute. When trilogies were acted, the contest must often have extended through successive days.

A trilogy consisted of three tragedies, the subjects of which were not necessarily allied and continuous, though they often were. Occasionally a tetralogy was produced, by adding to the three tragedies a fourth piece, which was usually a satiric drama.

The prize was not awarded to the victor by the suffrages of the assembled multitude, though their impressions naturally influenced the decision. It was committed, by the presiding archon, to the award of a select number of judges, who were bound by a solemn oath to observe the most rigid impartiality, though their virtue, it appears, was not so stern as to be always inaccessible to a bribe. The victor was crowned in the presence of the assembled multitude, and hailed by their enthusiastic plaudits. Glory was the real prize, for a

wreath of ivy was the only visible fruit of the triumph. Horace probably had a special eye to this fact in designating the Greeks

“*præter laudem nullius avaris.*”

The name not only of the victor was proclaimed, but those also of the one or two who approached the nearest to him in merit.

It appears from the Symposium of Plato, in which Agatho, a tragic poet who had gained the prize, is introduced, that it was usual for the victor to offer sacrifice for his success in the presence of his friends, and his choral performers, at the earliest opportunity after the contest.

The prize of the victorious chorus was a tripod, and it was usually dedicated by the choregus, or chorus-master, in a particular street or quarter adjoining the theatre, and thence denominated “Tripodes.” To these tripods were attached the names of the presiding archon, of the poet who composed the piece, and of the choregus. Most of the choragic inscriptions at Athens are of the

latter part of the fourth century. Many of the tripods were placed on temples dedicated to Bacchus; others on columns and rocks near the theatre, as their remains still testify.* These monuments are not only in themselves interesting, but fix beyond doubt the site of the Dionysian theatre. "Among them is the beautiful little temple of Lysicrates, in honour of the victory of his chorus, with a roof rising to a triangular apex, for the support of the prize tripod. It answers exactly to one of those temples mentioned by Pausanias as standing in the quarter of the tripods, between the Prytaneum and the sacred inclosure of Bacchus."†

The number of festivals and processions at Athens requiring the services of a chorus, was such, that each tribe was obliged to provide a choregus, who was maintained, if the tribe was poor, at the expense of the state. The first duty of the choregus, after providing a set of singers and musicians, selected in general from his own tribe, was to ap-

* Leake's Athens, p. 153.

† Id.

point a teacher (*χοροδιδάσκαλος*) to instruct them in their parts. Their diet was regulated with a view to strengthen the voice. He had also to furnish the sacred clothes adorned with gold, and all the other ornamental appendages of the performers. At festivals and pompous processions he appeared at their head, wearing a gilt crown and a splendid robe.

From this account it will be evident that the office of choregus involved a considerable expense, and, although the standard was limited by law, it was often exceeded through vanity and the desire of distinction. In subsequent times, when tragedy was propagated from Athens into the courts of princes, the splendour of the tragic chorus was exceedingly magnificent, as at Alexandria and Rome, which led Horace to complain that the beauties of the poetry attracted far less attention than the gaudiness of the accompaniments.

The choregi appointed by the tribes were allotted by the archon to the rival poets, which was called "giving a chorus."

Contests between rival choruses were not confined to tragic representation, but occurred at various public festivals. A tripod appears to have been the customary prize; but in earlier times, when a goat was the prize of tragedy, the Cyclian choruses, according to Bentley, contended for a bull, and the harpers for a calf.

The famous Simonides won fifty-six of these victories, as appears from an epitaph on his tomb, recorded by Tzetzes.

Ἐξ ἐπὶ πεντήκοντα, Σιμωνίδῃ ἦραο νίκας
Καὶ τρίποδας.*

His great contemporaries, Themistocles and Aristides, disdained not to undertake in their turn the office of choregi. Aristides (says Plutarch) dedicated in the temple of Bacchus choraic tripods on

* “ Fifty-six victories and as many tripods, oh Simonides, thou didst obtain.” The above facts are collected from Voyage d’Anacharsis, vol. ii. c. 12; Boeckh’s Economy of Athens, vol. ii. 207; Bentley’s Phalaris, 254. 289; and “ Theatre of the Greeks,” p. 202.

account of his victory, which still exist with this inscription. “The tribe Antiochis gained* the victory, Aristides was choregus, Archestratus composed the piece.” The same author states that Themistocles, when choregus at a tragic representation, won the prize, and put up a tablet in memory of his triumph, with this inscription. “Themistocles was choregus, Phrynichus wrote the piece, Adimantus was archon.” Plutarch enumerates, among various other choregi, the illustrious name of Plato.

The commonalty of Athens were admitted to the theatre, by a decree passed through the influence of Pericles, at the rate of two oboli per head, which sum the magistrates were directed to pay for every applicant unable to pay for himself. The public treasury of Athens, supplied in a great

* Ἀντιοχὶς ἐνίκη· Ἀριστείδης ἐχορήγει, Ἀρχέστρατος ἐδίδασκε—*Plut. in Aris.* He says of Themistocles, ἐνίκησε δὲ καὶ χορηγῶν ἐν τραγωδοῖς, &c.—καὶ πινακὰ τῆς νικῆς ἀνέθηκε, τοιαύτην ἐπιγραφὴν έχοντα Θημιστοκλῆς ἐχορήγει—Φρυνιχὸς ἐδίδασκει—Ἀδείμαντος ἤρχεν.

measure by the contributions levied on her allies, was prodigally drawn upon for this purpose. Severe censures were occasionally flung out against the dishonesty of the practice by public orators, but the people were so tenacious of their privilege, that even the eloquence of Demosthenes, when directed against it, proved unavailing.

A remarkable instance is recorded of the degree in which their imaginations were absorbed by the fictitious events of the drama. The dreadful intelligence of the complete destruction of the Athenian fleet and army under Nicias in Sicily, towards the close of the Peloponnesian war, reached the city when its numerous population was assembled in the theatre, entirely absorbed by the representation of a drama half tragic, half comic, by Hegemon. The messenger announced the fatal news. Scarcely a person there but had lost a son, or husband, a brother, or a friend. A moment's pause gave expression to a thrilling sensation of general grief. The next moment a signal was given to go on with the piece, and, wrapping

their heads in their mantles, they continued to survey, or listen to it, to the end.*

The latter days of Æschylus corresponded not in prosperity to those of his youth and manhood. It is certain that he incurred voluntary exile from Athens, though the exact cause is involved in obscurity. Probably a concurrence of disappointments had soured his lofty and ambitious spirit, and he had to encounter in the Athenian mob a people whose caprice was proverbial.

On one occasion popular indignation was excited against him on a charge of his having been

* The passage in Athenæus is so curious that learned readers will thank us for its insertion.

ἐν δὲ τῇ Γιγαντομαχίᾳ οὕτω σφόδρα τοὺς Ἀθηναίους ἐκήλησεν, ὥς ἐν ἐκείνῃ τῇ ἡμέρᾳ πλεῖστα αὐτοὺς γελάσαι· καὶ τοὶ ἀγγεληθέντων αὐτοῖς ἐν τῷ θεάτρῳ τῶν γενομένων περὶ Σικελίαν ἀτυχημάτων, οὐδεὶς ἀπέστη, καὶ τοὶ σχεδὸν πᾶσι τῶν οἰκείων ἀπολωλότων· ἔκλαιον οὖν ἐγκαλυψάμενοι, οὐκ ἀνέστησαν δὲ, ἵνα μὴ γένωνται διαφανεῖς τοῖς ἀπὸ τῶν ἄλλων πόλεων θεωρουσιν ἀχθόμενοι τῇ συμφορᾷ· διεμειναν δ' ἀκροώμενοι· καὶ τοὶ καὶ αὐτοῦ τοῦ Ἡγήμονος, ὥς ἤκουσεν, σιωπᾷν διεγνωκότος.—lib. ix. 407.

guilty of violating in a tragedy the sanctity of the Eleusinian mysteries. Clemens Alexandrinus,* who notices the charge, says that he escaped by proving to his judges that he was not initiated, and that his fault was therefore unintentional; but Ælian,† who touches on the same topic in the fifth book of his history, asserts that he would have been capitally condemned, had not his brother, Ameinias, averted the fury of the judges and of the people, by stepping forwards, and appealing to their feelings in favour of Æschylus by displaying the stump of the arm which he had himself lost in the action of Salamis.

This story is probably founded in fact; for the Greeks became furious when any indignity, either real or supposed, was offered to the objects of their superstitious worship. Thus Aristophanes introduces in his “Frogs” an imprecation of vengeance on one Cynesias, who had offered insult to the bust of Hecate. Thus also Thucydides paints

* Strom. lib. ii. c. xiv.

† Ælian, lib. v. c. 19.

in vivid colours the popular fury excited against Alcibiades, when suspected of mutilating, or causing to be mutilated, the Hermæ, fixed upon the side of the public ways in and about Athens; and similar instances of popular superstition might be multiplied from Grecian history.

The retirement of Æschylus from Athens has also been ascribed to resentment at the preference bestowed upon a tragedy of his rival Sophocles, in the case of a contest, instituted on a memorable occasion. According to Plutarch,* Cimon, in obedience to an oracle, commanding the Athenians to bring back the bones of their ancient hero Theseus to Attica, had diligently sought, and successfully discovered these remains in the isle of Scyros, whence he transferred them with great pomp to their native seat. In celebration of this popular act, public games were instituted, and the tragic poets were invited to a contest. When it took place the prize was awarded in a more solemn

* Plut. in Cimone.

manner than usual; for, at the request of the presiding archon, the judges were named by Cimon and his officers, who graced the occasion with their presence. The prize, after much deliberation, was assigned to Sophocles, which Æschylus was so little able to brook, that he quitted his country for Sicily, where he was hospitably received by Hiero of Syracuse, a prince of literary tastes and great munificence, and whose name has been immortalized by the muse of Pindar.

The fame of Æschylus had already been established on so firm a basis, and the generosity of his disposition is so imprinted on his poetry, that it would scarcely be just, to credit on evidence no better than that of a writer so late as Plutarch, a story thus derogatory to the moral qualities of his mind. Whatever concurrence of circumstances made him leave Athens, it is certain that he never returned thither, and that he settled in Sicily.

Literature and the arts were cultivated at this period with distinguished success in that island. The court of Hiero was the resort of men of

genius from various parts of Greece, among whom the names of Xenocles in philosophy, and of Simonides and Bacchilides in poetry, are particularly recorded. Pindar also was a cherished visitant at the court of Hiero, and the expatriated poet, in case they met there, must have found in him not only a kindred genius, but one who, from his intimate acquaintance with Athens, was peculiarly qualified to enter into his feelings.

How long he survived his self-banishment is not certain. Sicily, notwithstanding its local and literary attractions, must have appeared insipid, compared with Athens, to so ambitious and ardent a spirit; and a constant though involuntary recurrence to the scenes and circumstances of his early friendships and triumphs, and to the rupture of the ties which linked him with them, diffused probably a pensive, if not a sombre tinge over his latter days.

But if, as Plutarch asserts, his feelings were wounded, his language and reasoning were philosophical. Athenæus quotes with great encomium

his having said, in allusion to the preference shown to his rival, "that he dedicated his own tragedies to Time."*

He also ascribes to him the following saying, very modest as to his own productions, and full of reverence for the Mæonian bard, "that his pieces were but scraps from the magnificent banquets of Homer."† This acknowledgment, though couched in terms which none but himself would have applied to his own splendid poetry, was fundamentally just; for there is no doubt that he had studied Homer deeply, that he had regarded him as his model, and that the orientalisms which, as Fabricius has remarked, more frequently occur in him than in any other Attic writer, were a result of this preference.

That he composed tragedies in his retirement is certain, for Athenæus accuses him of having fallen into Sicilianisms in some of them; and one is par-

* Athenæus, viii. 8.

† Ibid.

ticularly recorded as having been composed out of compliment to Hiero, shortly after he arrived at his court.

The cause to which his death is ascribed, though mentioned by various authors, and made the subject of ancient gems, wears a fabulous aspect. An eagle, it is pretended, as it hovered over a rocky spot where he was seated, wrapt in meditation, let fall from its talons a tortoise, which, lighting directly upon his bald head, fractured the skull. It is added, with ludicrous gravity, that the eagle mistook the crown of his head for a piece of rock, and intended to break upon it the shell of the tortoise.

His death is assigned to the eighty-first Olympiad, when he was in his sixty-ninth year.

His remains were honoured by Hiero with a distinguished funeral, which was signalized by tragic contests. Resplendent as was the poetic fame of Æschylus, he valued himself still more on the glory he had acquired at Marathon, and there-



...as having been surprised out
of his senses, and he retired at
the same time.

The cause to which his death is ascribed, though
mentioned by various authors, and easily the sub-
ject of general story, is a fabulous one. An
eagle, it is said, as he passed over a rocky
spot, saw a man sitting in meditation, let
his talons fall upon his head, which, lighting di-
rectly upon his bald head, fractured the skull. It
is added, with ludicrous gravity, that the eagle
mistook the crown of his head for a piece of rock,
and intended to break upon it the shell of the
skull.

...the eagle mistook the crown of his head for a piece of rock,
and intended to break upon it the shell of the
skull. ... was the poetic
... himself still more on
the story he had acquired at Marathon, and there-
fore



from an antique Gem.

fore ordered the following Epitaph to be inscribed upon his tomb.*

*Αἰσχύλου Εὐφορίωνος Ἀθηναίου τόδε κεύθει
Μνῆμα καταφθίμενου πυροφόροιο Γέλας·
Ἀλκὴν δ' εὐδόκιμον Μαραθῶνιον ἄλσος ἄν εἴποι,
Καὶ βαθυχαιτήεις Μῆδος ἐπιστάμενος.*

THIS TOMB COVERS THE REMAINS OF ÆSCHYLUS THE ATHENIAN, THE SON OF EUPHORION, WHO DIED AT GELAS, FERTILE IN CORN. THE GLADES OF MARATHON WOULD ATTEST HIS DISTINGUISHED VALOUR, AND THE LONG-HAIRED MEDE WHO PROVED IT.

* There is scarcely an Athenian oration in Thucydides, but refers to Marathon, either directly or by implication; and in much later times the well known apostrophe of Demosthenes to the heroes who had perished there, proves that the Orator well knew he was touching a chord in the bosoms of his countrymen, the sympathetic vibration of which was certain. Even modern patriotism thrills at the mention of Marathon. Johnson's fine passage need not be quoted, because it is stored in the memory of every cultivated Englishman. In this point of view, Pericles spoke with the force of prediction when he said, in the course of his noble funeral oration, "the whole earth is the sepul-

The distinction acquired by Æschylus in the sphere of the drama, naturally fired the ambition of men of genius to enter on the same career.

Allusion has already been made to Sophocles as a successful rival of Æschylus. He was just rising into notice when the fame of the former approached its maturity. The first mention of him is coupled with the fact, that he was selected, from his personal accomplishments, to form one of a chorus of distinguished youths, who sung a pæan round the public trophy which was erected in Athens in honour of the battle of Marathon.*

Æschylus was one of the most distinguished of the heroes who were then hailed by the grateful plaudits of their countrymen. If his eye lighted

chre of illustrious men, nor is the epitaph, engraven on tomb-stones, in their native land, the sole guardian of their fame, but the memory of their actions in other countries, forms a more faithful record in the heart, than any that human hands can fabricate." — *Vide Thucyd. lib. ii. 43.*

* Vita Soph. Ed. Brunck.

on the graceful youth, how little did he think that he beheld in him the most formidable rival of his fame.

Inferior to Æschylus in those qualities of genius which tend to the sublime and the terrible, and seldom rivalling his coruscations of lyrical splendour, Sophocles excelled him in the judicious selection of his incidents, in a more correct delineation of the workings of the passions, in the skilful development of his plots, and in producing, by a train of circumstances apparently natural in their connection, the most startling coincidences.

He also restricted within more judicious limits the choral interludes, which, in the dramas of Æschylus, often ran into prolixity. Aristotle refers to great improvements introduced by him in scenical decoration and invention. His style was dignified, and, at the same time, so mellifluous, that it procured for him the appellation of the Attic Bee. He was extremely popular with his contemporaries, to whom he was endeared by the fine qualities of his heart, as well as by his distin-

guished acquirements. His life was prolonged to the great age of ninety-one, and when, after attaining eighty years, he had to defend himself against a charge of mental imbecility, he put his accusers to the blush by publicly reading his *Œdipus Coloneus*, one of the most perfect of his tragedies, and then recently composed. His judges, at the close of this remarkable defence, dissolved the assembly, and conducted him home in triumph.

About the time that *Æschylus* quitted Athens, appeared *Euripides*, the last in order of time of the illustrious trio of the Greek tragedians.

He enjoyed every advantage of education afforded by that accomplished age. In philosophy, *Anaxagoras* was his instructor, and in eloquence, *Prodicus*, the most celebrated sophist of the day. According to *Aulus Gellius* he entered on the tragic contest at the early age of eighteen, but the higher authority of the *Arundel marble* fixes it at the eighty-first Olympiad, when he was in his twenty-fifth year.

During a period of forty-six years he proved a



...of his life ... to
the great age of ... after attain-
ing ... years, he had to ... against
a charge of mental ... he ... answers
to the ... of ... his ... Co-
lumbus ... of his tragedies,
... at the
... of the ... the an-
... and ...

About the year ... visited Athens,
appeared Euripides, the last of ... of time of
the illustrious trio of the Greek tragedians.

He enjoyed every advantage of education afforded
by the ... age. In philosophy, Anax-
agoras ... and ... Pro-
tagoras ... of the day.
... on the tra-
gic ... but the
higher authority of the ... fixes it at
the eighty-first Olympiad, when he was in his
... year.

During a period of forty ... he proved a

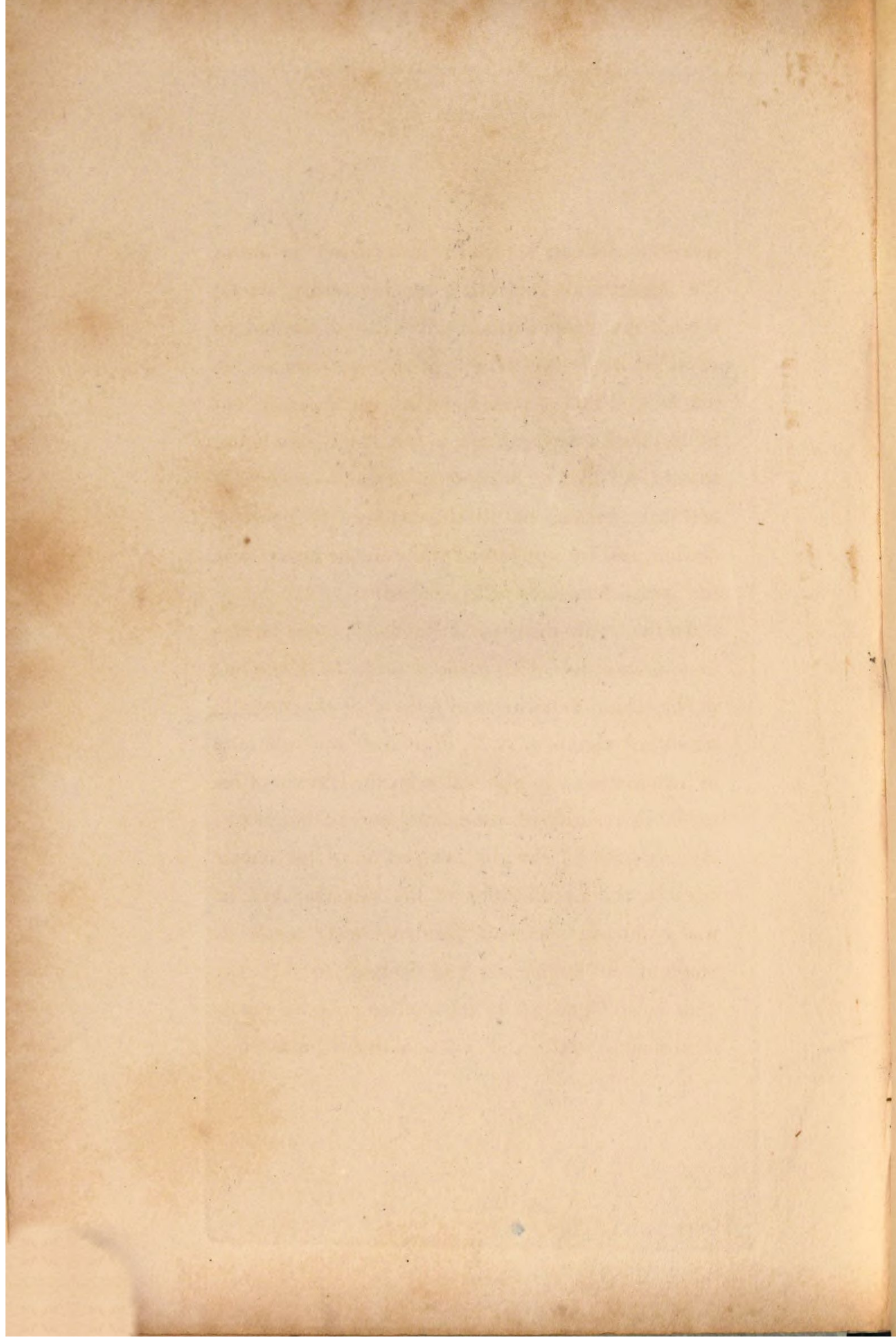


Euripides

Sophocles



Aeschylus



powerful rival to Sophocles, and soared far above the competition of other contemporary poets, though the unjust caprice or venality of the judges occasionally bestowed the prize on rivals far his inferiors. To the improvements already engrafted by Sophocles on the tragic art, it was his ambition to add by higher degrees of dramatic effect, or scenical illusion, by all the artifices of polished diction, and by a greater variety in the music, and the lyrical measures of his choruses.

In the loftier qualities of the tragic muse he was unequal to either of his predecessors—to Æschylus, in the strong delineation of individual character, in masculine vigour of style, in fervour and sublimity of imagination—to Sophocles, in the texture of his plots, in majesty of sentiment, and of language; and to both in the able adaptation of his choral odes to the peculiarities of his subjects; but he was eminently successful in depicting scenes or emotions of tenderness and feeling, in the easy and natural conduct of his dialogue, in an oratorical flow of style, and in a felicitous admixture of

moral reflections with the course of his subjects. These he brought into his tragedies from the school of Socrates, and the philosopher, it is said, took pleasure in witnessing their representation. His dramas frequently exhibit strange contrasts of exquisite beauties, and revolting absurdities. After deeply touching the heart by the devotion, the delicacy, and the tenderness of conjugal affection in his *Alceste*, for instance, he disgusts the taste of his readers towards the conclusion of the piece, by the low buffoonery with which he has invested the character of *Hercules*.

Often he is betrayed by his oratorical powers into a redundancy unsuited to the language of passion, which is broken, short, and exclamatory.

On some occasions he approaches the elevation of *Æschylus*. The scene which paints the feelings of *Orestes* (in the tragedy bearing his name,) when haunted and pursued by the furies, is one of the finest pieces of sublime poetic painting in any language.

He has been severely censured for violating the

original dignity of tragedy, by seductive effeminacy of language and sentiment, by the occasional introduction of amatory descriptions deficient in delicacy, by painting in some of his dramas the progress of incestuous attachments, and by the unrestrained use both of musical and metrical arts, excitve of sensual passions.

After a long career of active, and often successful competition, he incurred, like *Æschylus*, voluntary exile, and ended his days at the court of Archelaus, king of Macedon, from whom he experienced the kindest and most distinguished reception.

Domestic infelicity, and disappointed ambition, are conjectured to have concurred in leading him to renounce Athens.

His death is ascribed to a cruel cause, laceration by ferocious hounds, which are said to have seized upon the unfortunate poet, as he rambled through the recesses of a solitary wood.

The renown of this poet pervaded Greece in an extraordinary degree, and a remarkable instance

of it is mentioned by Plutarch* as having occurred after the total defeat and capture of the Athenian army in Sicily, under Nicias, when every soldier who could repeat a line of Euripides was excepted from the cruel fate which befel his comrades in arms.

The respective merits of these three great tragedians was a favourite subject of discussion at Athens.

With the lower classes, Euripides seems to have been the favourite. The simplicity of his dialogue, and the triteness of his moral aphorisms, brought him within the level of their capacity. But with men of cultivated taste, the lofty inspiration of Æschylus, and the chastened grandeur of Sophocles, secured them the preference. Peculiar reverence was also felt towards the former as the acknowledged father of tragedy, and a signal instance of it was given after his death by a law forbidding the repetition of any pieces in the theatre,

* Plutarch in Nyciâ.

excepting those of Æschylus. In process of time the same honour was paid to his two rivals.

A very witty and animated debate on the respective merits of Æschylus and Euripides is preserved in the latter part of the “Frogs” of Aristophanes.*

The scene is laid in the Pagan world of spirits, by one of the customs of which, it is feigned, that men, illustrious in any art or profession, occupy there a rank and station, conformable to their genius and acquirements in the world above.

The question in debate is, which of the two above named bards has the best claim to the seat

* Since the first pages of this Dissertation were committed to the press, the Quarterly Review, for February, was published, in one of the Articles of which, on the Greek Dramatic Poets, this self-same scene from the “Frogs” is ably described; and illustrated by a spirited translation of some of its most remarkable passages. It is flattering to the author to find himself on various points in accordance with the learned writer of that article.

of honour, or president's chair, in the Prytaneum* of the shades.

Till the arrival of Euripides, Æschylus had held it in undisputed supremacy, but it is now confidently claimed by the former; the discussion becomes warm, and in order to put a stop to the growing confusion, Pluto orders that the question shall be gravely debated in his presence. Sophocles upon this, gives notice that should the prescriptive claims of Æschylus be no longer allowed, he himself will contend for the post of honour, for though he reverently yields it to the father of tragedy, he entirely disallows the pretensions of Euripides. Much of humorous and mock preparation for the encounter takes place, after which the chorus breaks forth thus:—

* The Prytaneum was a large public hall at Athens, in which (among other uses to which it was applied) it was customary to honor any citizen who had rendered signal services to the state with a public entertainment.

How will the bard of furious soul,
 Swell with indignant rage,
 His glaring eyes in phrenzy roll
 To see his wily foe preparing to engage!
 Grand shall now the contest be
 Of glittering phraseology:
 While one shall every strained conceit refine,
 Paring each thought, and polishing each line,
 The other, scorning art's dull track to try,
 Shall pour his genuine thoughts in loftiest poesy.
 His bristly neck aloft he'll rear,
 And shake his shaggy mane,
 A low'ring frown his brow shall wear,
 Fierce emblem of disdain.
 While he in furious mood along,
 Shall roll his complicated song, &c. &c.

* * * * *
 * * * * *

With powers of pliability,
 And tuneful tongue the other fraught,
 Studious of smoothest harmony,
 Shall twist and torture ev'ry thought,
 While with superior subtilty,
 In many a nicely laboured phrase,
 Champing the bit of envy, he
 Retorts upon his rival's sounding lays.*

* Dunster's Translation of the Frogs.

Then follows a scene in which Euripides taunts his rival with his lofty and turgid phraseology, his swelling conceptions, and his imaginary monsters.

Æschylus retorts upon him as dealing in notorious plagiarisms, artificial conceits, and demoralizing subjects.

Several successive scenes occur, in which each criticises with much wit and irony the subjects, characters, and diction of the other, and parodies with great felicity some of the prologues and choruses in the most celebrated tragedies of his rival. The comedian is evidently, throughout, the partisan of Æschylus, and therefore gives him the advantage in this war of words. As Euripides was a friend of Socrates, to whose party Aristophanes was most inimical, he never appears disposed to do him common justice, but frequently introduces his name in his dramas, in a tone of ridicule or sarcasm. No translation can do justice to the lucid beauty of style, and the pointed wit of the original in the scenes alluded to, but the scholar,

who studies them with a competent knowledge of the tragedies of the contending poets, will be greatly amused and interested.

One of the accusations urged by Æschylus deserves to be adverted to, on account of its moral force and dignity. He charges Euripides with having degraded tragedy from the elevated sphere in which he had fixed it,

“High actions and high passions best describing ;”

and of rendering it the vehicle of exciting amatory and licentious feelings. Euripides defends himself by the trite remark, that he had only painted such stories as he found them; upon which Æschylus asserts, in lofty strains, that instruction is the proper end and aim of poetry, and that it behoves a poet rather to hide tales of infamy, than to corrupt the public ear with their pernicious details.

The moment of decision at length arrives. Bacchus, who is present, and who, as the god of tragedy, is appealed to as judge between the poets,

passes sentence in favour of Æschylus, and commissions him to repair again to the upper world, to vindicate the original dignity of the tragic muse. The poet prepares to obey, and desires that in his absence the seat of honour may be occupied by Sophocles.

What is called the old comedy, discharged in those days at Athens some of the functions which the public press now assumes in England. It dealt in bold and biting satire upon public men and measures; it zealously embraced the interests of one or other of the rival factions which divided public opinion, and it panegyrised, or censured with the utmost freedom, poets and philosophers, magistrates and senators, military or naval officers, according to the opinions or prejudices of the writer.

Thus far, it may easily be conceived, that, in a country where no reviews or newspapers existed to give vent to public opinion, comedy might often exercise a useful and wholesome influence on passing events.

But it went still further in point of license, for not only were prominent individuals thus attacked, but they were brought upon the stage by their names, without any ceremony; and even their features, dress, and gait, were so mimicked by masks, and other scenical devices, that none could possibly mistake them.

The tyranny thus exercised became at length so generally odious, that a law was passed making it highly penal to introduce any person by name into such pieces; but what could no longer be effected by direct means was brought about by allusions and approximation. A new era of comedy thus arose, in which imaginary characters, often intended as representatives of real ones, were introduced, and on such occasions the ingenuity of authors in framing was responded to by that of the public in tracing out the intended resemblances.

Hence it follows that comedy casts a very distinct light upon the state of manners, parties, and politics at Athens in the most interesting period of her history. Aristophanes, the writer from whose pages this light is principally reflected, was an ex-

..



traordinary compound of qualities the most opposite, and of talents the most diversified.

Of some of his dramas such is the acknowledged licentiousness, that it can argue no false delicacy in the author to avow his ignorance of their details. Lewd ribaldry ceases not to be polluting and detestable from wearing the livery of a learned language.

Even in the most unexceptionable, many passages of great coarseness and low buffoonery occur. The dignified style and the moral tone of tragedy among the Greeks, were the very antipodes to the license of their comedy, which, regarded as a comment on Athenian manners, indicates their extreme corruption. But whilst reprobating with a just indignation the coarse language, and the revolting indecency of the ancient comedians, do we sufficiently remember that the thin veil under which the licentious allusions of the modern stage are affected to be concealed, is only another, and a more insidious mode of communicating moral pollution, and that the insinuations of vice are often the most fraught with danger, when the most studiously divested of heathen grossness?

It ought, however, to be added, that this grossness was partly caused by the want of female influence on manners in Greece. Custom condemned the ladies to a species of Oriental seclusion, and society was thus not only deprived of its greatest charm, but also of that salutary restraint, which a due regard to their feelings imposes upon language in modern company. But the qualities which entitle Aristophanes to attention, in spite of these dark blemishes, belong only to genius the most brilliant, and to an intellect the most superior. He is not merely a poet of the most diversified powers, but a statesman, a satirist, and a critic of great acuteness and penetration. To students of history, or of man, his political and satirical dramas cannot fail to prove highly interesting, from their minute and expressive portraiture of the manners and habits of the Athenians of all orders; while the politician may trace in them the fatal consequences, both to social order and to rational liberty, from the struggles of factions and parties, in a government purely democratic. Hence it was

that Plato, in reply to various inquiries of Dionysius of Syracuse relative to the constitution and manners of the Athenians, sent him the works of Aristophanes; and to the same redeeming qualities must be ascribed the predilection for his writings, said to have been entertained by St. Chrysostom. Though corrupted by familiar acquaintance with vice and profligacy, and hurried down the tide of dissoluteness by conformity to general custom, he recurred in imagination with keen regret to the examples of a purer age, and appealed, in this spirit, to the honor and patriotism which rendered Athens illustrious in the age of Conon and Miltiades. The poetry of elevated sentiment, of graceful ease, of elegant playfulness, and of brilliant fancy, mingles in his pages with that of wild buffoonery and cruel personality. From low ribaldry his dialogue often emerges into a style polished and graceful, elegant and simple, seasoned with Attic salt, enlivened by wit and pleasantry. Occasionally he even soars in his choruses into the sublime of sentiment and de-

scription, or gives the rein to his sportive and luxuriant imagination in depicting scenes of ancient mythology, or fiction, with a richness and glow of colouring somewhat akin to the playful and charming effusions to be found in Milton's *Comus*.

The boldness and variety of his allegories, and his ingenious personifications of abstract qualities, are curious features in his poetry, and form the vehicle of some of his most biting satire.

So close is the connection of many of his dramas with the state of parties and manners at Athens, in the age of Pericles, that a brief analysis of two among them, which more peculiarly reflect light on these topics, will be rather in the nature of an episode, than a digression. The "*Knights*" and the "*Clouds*" are the two selected for this purpose. The first is a political satire upon the evils of democracy, the last is a playful criticism on the fashionable system of education and philosophy at Athens.

It must be borne in mind that the Athenian

constitution, as organized by Solon, was a democracy, in which the sovereign power was vested in a popular assembly, where every freeman had an equal right to speak and vote. To guard against the excesses of popular license under such a form of government, he formed an aristocracy, based on property, to whom all civil offices were restricted, and who exercised great controlling powers in the administration of affairs, as members of two councils, the one the court of Areopagus, the other a senate, subsequently termed "*The Five Hundred.*" These mixed principles of government were in many respects unskillfully blended, and, as a natural consequence, fierce struggles for pre-eminence often occurred between the popular and the aristocratic factions. The qualification of property for office, established by Solon, was abolished by Aristides, soon after the close of the Persian war, and the honors of the state indiscriminately opened to the ambition of citizens of every degree. Thenceforwards the populace assumed a more active part in the business of the

general assembly, and the government became increasingly democratic. The privileges of the aristocracy were still further abridged by Pericles, who courted popular favour as a stepping stone to the supremacy at which his ambition aspired. Though the democratic faction was, in general, kept at bay by the influence of his commanding talents and sage policy, popular license not unfrequently vented itself, through the comic poets, in coarse jokes upon his person and manners, and in bitter invectives on his public measures. After his death, that faction gained an entire ascendancy. The workshop and the manufacture were deserted for the general assembly; property and rank lost their due control, and political influence was only to be obtained by pandering to the passions, or flattering the vices of the populace. The deference which had formerly been paid to a Miltiades, and a Cimon, men equally illustrious for rank and talent, was usurped by factious demagogues, of coarse but ready eloquence, of levelling but selfish principles. From Lysicles and Eucrates, the one

a seller of tow, the other a dealer in cattle, the democratic sceptre at length descended to Cleon,* a tanner, who, for several years, was the popular idol. Of extraordinary impudence, but little courage, fluent in the assembly, but irresolute in the field, boastful of his integrity, yet skilled in all the arts of speculation, a vehement assertor of popular rights, and a fierce calumniator of men of rank and property, in profession a patriot, but practically the slave of selfishness, he became, by force of caballing and intrigue, the head of a formidable party, and hur-

* Some of the leading features in the description of Cleon are from Mitford's Greece. For his reference to the above-named demagogues the author is indebted to Mr. Mitchell, the learned translator of some of the comedies of Aristophanes, and he gladly avails himself of this opportunity of acknowledging that the Preliminary Discourse to that work has much aided his researches on various particulars connected with the dramatic literature of Athens. Its portraiture of the philosophical coteries of that capital, and of the state of manners and parties, is fraught with elegant and profound learning, and with the touches of a vigorous and expressive pencil.

ried Athens, by his infatuated councils, into measures which reduced her to anarchy, and proved the precursors of her political degradation.

To attack such a man with effect in the meridian of his power required no small degree of skill and courage. The task was undertaken by Aristophanes, and successfully accomplished in a drama entitled the "Knights," or, as Wieland calls it, the Demagogues, the object of which is to expose the profligacy and baseness of Cleon, and to incite the Athenians to assert their independence. The sovereign people itself is personified by the appellation of Demus (i. e. people), in the character of an irascible and capricious old man, vicious and credulous, the dupe of charlatans, and governed at the present moment by this very *Cleon*, who is introduced as one of his domestics. Nicias and Demosthenes,* the leaders of

* It is scarcely needful to state that the Demosthenes alluded to, was not the orator of that name, but a general of considerable reputation.

the aristocratic party, are also introduced as slaves of Demus, and impatient of their sufferings under the caprices of Cleon. An oracle informs them that their oppressor is to be put down by a sausage-vender, and happening soon after to meet with one, they intreat him to undertake their cause, assuring him that he is the destined head of the Athenian republic, and all its dependencies; that he shall trample under foot the senate, cashier generals, and revel in luxury, undisputed Lord of the Prytaneum. The astonished sausage-seller at first declines the dangerous pre-eminence, and honestly avows his utter ignorance and incapacity; but is at last persuaded that to act the statesman is a much easier task than he had been led to imagine. The scene in which this discussion occurs is so amusing, and in a style of such biting sarcasm upon the levelling tendencies of democracy, that we will attempt a translation of some parts of it.

Speakers—SAUSAGE-VENDER *and* DEMOSTHENES.*

S. V.—I should like to know how it is possible for me, a mere sausage-vender, to become a great man.

* Aristoph. *Equites*, 180, &c. ed. Brunck.

D.—Why, you possess the very qualities that fit you for it; you are unprincipled, you are of the canaille, and a desperado.

S. V.—I really deem myself unworthy to fill a place of such power.

D.—Pooh, pooh! why proze about worthiness?—You appear to me conscious of being something superior. Surely your parents were honourable and upright.

S. V.—On the contrary, they were infamous.

D.—Well then, you may bless your stars—that every qualification for a statesman centers in you.

S. V.—But my good friend, I know nothing of learning beyond my letters, and even these very imperfectly.*

D.—So much the better. Learning is needless for a demagogue, and good principles an incumbrance. 'Tis better to be ignorant and brutish; therefore dont reject that which the gods have decreed to you by oracles.

* * * * *

S. V.—The oracles call *me*! I am astonished it should be thought possible for me to govern the country.

D.—Nothing is more easy; go on exactly as you

* The Greek literally says, “I know nothing of music beyond my letters;” but music is here put for education in general, which at Athens began with musical science, accompanied by grammar.

do now ; embroil state affairs just as you chop up meat for your sausages, win over the mob at all hazards, cajole them by high-seasoned words ; nature seems to have destined you for a demagogue. You have a deafening voice, you are a scoundrel-born ; you have all the slang of the forum. In short you are a ready furnished politician. The oracles, even that of Apollo, fix their mark upon you. Assert then the garland—pour out a libation to folly—and have at your adversary.*

Presently Cleon appears, and terror seizes the sausage-seller, but reassured by the knights (an order of men between the high aristocracy and the people who form the chorus to the piece) he proves,

* When democracy was at its height in Athens, the *ordinary* state of society very much resembled that of a town in England on the eve of a fiercely-contested election. The first impression, observes Mr. Mitchell, of a reader of the “Knights,” would naturally be that a state so circumstanced could not exist a single week ; but the earlier events of the French revolution prove that the poet may have been within the limits of truth, caustic as he is ; for “the Demus of Aristophanes then became a real person,” and the parts of Cleon, &c. were played with an easiness and suppleness that fully justify the portraits of the comic writer. Try democracy in your own house only for a week, said Lycurgus to one who censured the Spartan constitution, and then judge for yourself how far it is suited to the purposes of good government.

in a fierce war of words, an overmatch for him both in the senate and in the assembly of the people. The dialogue between them is a tissue of wild wit, fierce invective, and coarse buffoonery. At length the sovereign people is disabused. Cleon is turned out of office. Demus is delivered from thralldom, and reassuming the habits, sentiments and manners of ancient times, towers in the dignity of pristine virtue. The piece concludes with a splendid apostrophe to what Athens was when she won the laurels of Marathon, and revered the institutions of her ancestors.

Much of Attic salt, and many brilliant passages, occur in the "Knights," particularly one in which the poet describes the fates and fortunes of his predecessors in the comic art. As respects the wit of Aristophanes, it may in general be remarked, that more than half of it must be lost to the moderns from their ignorance of the sources of innumerable allusions, on which the edge of his irony, or the flashes of his fancy depended.

Cleon was so great an idol of the populace that

when the drama was brought upon the stage, no artist dared to form a mask of his features, nor any actor to personate him, upon which the poet himself, disguising his face with wine lees, as in the ancient days of tragedy, performed the part with a courage equal to the spirit of the satire.

The consequences were curious. General attention being thus directed to the public conduct of Cleon, he was fined for peculation; but such was his empire over the mob that he quickly became their darling again, and rode buoyant on the waves of popularity.

The next drama, of which we shall offer a brief analysis, is "the Clouds," on which the heavy charge long rested of having caused the cruel fate of Socrates, by directing against him, as an atheist, and a demoralizer of the youth of Athens, popular odium. But the charge, as respects any formal or direct influence of this description, has been rebutted by evidence demonstrating that its representation took place twenty-three years* before the

* Vide Brunckii, Not. at Aristoph. Nubes.

philosopher's trial and condemnation. The supposed coincidence of these events was probably a consequence of the grave reply to the witty sarcasms of the comedian, which Plato in his "Apology" puts into the mouth of Socrates, but the proper inference is, that the wit of the "Clouds" was so fresh in the recollection of the Athenian public, even after a lapse of many years, as to merit the passing notice of the philosopher. Ælian, the most credulous and careless of historians, furnished the groundwork of the story in question. The "Clouds" is a higher class of drama than the "Knights," both in the general art of its construction, and in the disposition of its parts. It attacks, in the person of Socrates, the doctrines of the sophists, who were at this time the fashionable instructors of the Athenian youth. The incidents are amusing. Strepsiades, a rich gentleman farmer of Attica, is brought into great pecuniary difficulties by the extravagance of a high-born wife, and the prodigality of a son who cares for nothing but horse and chariot-racing. Dunned

and harassed, he bethinks himself at last of applying to Socrates to be instructed in the art of circumventing his creditors, as well as to be initiated in the mysteries of a philosophy in which he gives him credit for being an adept, which can prove evil good, and good evil. He finds the philosopher too much absorbed in hypermundane speculations to listen to his queries, and all he can extract from him is an offer to summon the Clouds, the only deities whom he professes to revere, and by which the poet intends to personify the abstractions of a visionary mind, to unfold to the applicant the resources of wisdom. The invocation addressed to them, and the description of their descent, are happy examples of burlesque sublimity, and glow with the brilliant tints of the richest poetic colouring.

The ensuing dialogue is very amusing. The head of Strepsiades is full of his debts and difficulties, that of Socrates of airy abstractions, and logical subtleties. They interrupt, contradict, and misunderstand each other continually, till both

parties became highly impatient. Brunck, on the authority of Fontenelle, notices the similarity between this scene and some of those in Molière's *Bourgeois Gentilhomme*, "Le dessein de cette pièce, (says Fontenelle,) est fort plaisant. *Strepsiade* est le vrai *Bourgeois Gentilhomme*, par la difficulté qu'il a d'apprendre ; par ses méprises continuelles, et par la naïveté avec laquelle il rend ce qu'il a appris. Il ressemble fort aussi à *George Dandin*, quand il se plaint d'avoir épousé une femme de la ville, lui qui étoit un homme de la campagne."

It has already been observed that the intellectual ferment which prevailed at Athens soon after the termination of the Persian war, more or less pervaded all Greece. The most celebrated of the sophists were natives of the neighbouring states or islands, and came to Athens either in the quality of Ambassadors, or to give lectures on rhetoric and philosophy, for attendance on which very high fees were exacted. Masters of a subtle and bewildering logic, they professed to argue with equal facility on either side of a question, while they charmed

the ear by the antithetical brilliancy of a meretricious eloquence. When they appeared in public they were encircled by admiring followers, and were petted and courted in the convivial circles of Athens with the most flattering marks of distinction. Of one of the most celebrated among them, Hippias of Elis, it is said that he courted applause by appearing at the Olympic games, and astonishing the spectators not only by an imposing display of his skill in argumentation, his literary acquirements, and wonderful memory, but by the splendour of his robe, and by all the little arts of personal vanity and pretension. Of Prodicus of Ceos, Plato often makes mention, and so great was his celebrity that, *wiser than Prodicus*, had grown at Athens into a proverbial expression.

To the pernicious influence of the doctrines and tastes inculcated by this school, Aristophanes ascribes the growth of a general disregard among the higher classes for the institutions of their ancestors, and the prevalence of an ostentatious personal vanity, and a disgraceful effeminacy of

habits and manners. The dialogue of the Clouds, at its outset, is of the burlesque description, but with the further progress of the drama a grave discussion occurs between the personified spirits of the ancient and the modern system, under the titles of *δίκαιος* and *ἀδίκος*, in other words, the "Just" and the "Unjust."

With the exception of some coarse expressions, the part of the "Just" is sustained throughout this dialogue with a moral force and dignity, and a poetical beauty, which place it among the finest passages of didactic composition in the whole circle of classical poetry, though with a strange perversity, the poet, after giving the victory to him in argument, makes him avow that he is confuted.*

The force of the original is considerably diluted by the verbosity of Mr. Cumberland's translation,

* There is some reason to conjecture that the contradiction is to be ascribed to the carelessness of transcribers, as no less than three out of four of the manuscripts quoted by Brunck, assign this confession of defeat to Strepsiades, not to the "Just."

but the following extracts will at least give an idea of the spirit of some parts of the passage. The “Just” praises in eloquent terms the education of ancient times, founded in modesty, temperance and justice, and connected with manly and martial exercises and habits, tending to invigorate both mind and body. To which the “Unjust” replies,

Why these are maxims obsolete and stale ;
Worm-eaten rules, coeval with the hymns
Of old Ceceydas and Buphonian feasts—

Just.—Yet so were train’d the heroes that embru’d
The field of Marathon with hostile blood ;

* * * * *

Therefore be wise, young man, and turn to me,
Turn to the better guide, so shall you learn
To scorn the noisy forum, shun the bath,†
The scene impure detest, the taunter spurn,
And yield precedence due to hoary age ;

† The warm bath is meant, as explained in the verse 1040 of the original.

καιτοι τινα γνώμην ἔχων, ψέγεις τὰ θερμά λustra ;

In this passage I have taken the liberty of substituting for seven lines in Mr. Cumberland’s translation, four, which appear to me to express more perfectly the sense of the original,

Nor wound a parent's heart, nor stoop to ought
Which purity, and virtuous shame condemn.

* * * * *

Unj.—Aye, my brave youth, do follow these fine
rules,

And learn by them to be as mere a swine,
Driveller and dolt as any of the sons
Of our Hippocrates.

Just.—Not so, but fair and fresh in youthful bloom
Among our young athletics you shall shine ;
Not in the forum, loit'ring time away
In gossip prattle, like our gang of idlers,
Nor yet in some vexatious paltry suit,
Wrangling and quibbling in our petty courts ;
But in the solemn academic grove,
Crown'd with the modest reed, fit converse hold
With your collegiate equals ; there serene,
Calm as the scene around you, underneath
The fragrant foliage, which the ilex spreads,
Where the deciduous poplar strews her leaves,
Where the tall elm-tree, and wide-stretching-plane,
Sigh to the fanning breeze, you shall inhale
Sweet odours wafted on the breath of spring.
This is the regimen that will insure
A healthful body and a vigorous mind,
A countenance serene, expanded chest,
Heroic stature, and a temperate tongue.
But take these modern masters, and behold

These blessings all reversed : a pallid cheek,
 Shrunk shoulders, chest contracted, sapless limbs,
 A tongue that never rests, and mind debas'd
 By their vile sophistries, perversely taught
 To call good evil, evil good, and be
 A mere Antimachus—the sink of vice.

Chorus.—Oh sage instructor, how sublime
 These maxims of the former time !
 How sweet this unpolluted stream
 Of eloquence, how pure the theme ! &c. &c.

Now this and much more in a similar strain,
 which might be quoted, would have well befitted
 the lips of Socrates, and is in the spirit of the ad-
 vice which Plato in his “Apology” makes him say
 he often gave to the young men of Athens ; so
 that Aristophanes in classing him with the sophists,
 and ascribing to his philosophy a demoralizing in-
 fluence, either wilfully sacrificed truth to malevo-
 lence, or, which is far more probable, very imper-
 fectly understood his real opinions.

So much indeed did the rancour of party viru-
 lence envenom the satirical shafts of the comic
 poets, that it would often be impossible, in the
 absence of other lights, to distinguish between

truth and falsehood; but here, contemporary writers prove of signal service. — A Plato and a Xenophon, for instance, have secured to Socrates the homage of posterity, in spite of the cruel invectives of Aristophanes; while Cleon is scarcely less condemned by his coarse satire, than by the dignified and calm invective of the impartial and philosophic Thucydides.

Aided by these various sources of evidence, we are introduced into an intimate and minute acquaintance with the moral and social condition of the most extraordinary people, whether they are regarded in their literary or political relations, which the world has ever beheld. The peep thus obtained into the every-day life and habits of the Athenians, tends to dissolve the delusive spell with which the magic of their genius and taste might otherwise dazzle the imagination and pervert the judgment. We behold by way of contrast to the dignified orator, the brilliant poet, the almost creative artist, a busy multitude jostling and contending with each other on the arena of avarice, ambition,

or pleasure, in all the littleness of selfish and sordid views, in all the frenzy or the craft of political contention, and in all the unrestrained grossness of sensual depravity.

While we trace in their history the potent influence of free institutions in exciting the energies of the mind, and in nourishing ennobling sentiments of national and individual freedom, we are no less impressively taught that the excesses of liberty tend to a tyranny even more galling than despotism itself.

The general inferences to be drawn from this contemplation are not flattering to the hopes of those who fondly dream that moral excellence and social order are the *necessary* handmaids of augmenting knowledge and refinement.

If advancing science, if the culture of taste and genius, if the possession of the purest standards of both in the works of those immortal writers and artists who will draw back to Greece to the latest periods of time the admiring and accumulated homage of posterity, if all this could secure to a nation

the prevalence of moral excellence, or produce human perfectibility, Athens would have been the very sanctuary of virtue. But, however much these advantages may tend to polish and adorn our species, to heighten the charms of social intercourse, or to minister to the delights of lettered solitude, they may co-exist (and the state of Athenian society at this particular period is a signal proof of it) with deep moral depravity, and with unbridled dissoluteness of manners. Their beneficial influence affects the surface of society only, they cannot renovate or purify the heart. This is the province of the divine philosophy of Christianity alone, which, coming from God, is pregnant with power to enable its sincere votaries not only to believe what he promises, but also to obey what he commands.*

* The learned historian of Greece thus forcibly comments on the atrocious inhumanity of the polished Athenians about this period, in exterminating, on the capture of the isle of Melos, its peaceful and unoffending inhabitants. "This act, which would have been horrible even if perpetrated by a tribe of savages, took

Out of more than seventy tragedies composed by Æschylus only seven are extant, but among these are three of the most celebrated—the Prometheus, the Seven Chiefs before Thebes, and the Agamemnon.

Of the remaining four, the Coephoræ and the place in the peculiar country of philosophy and the fine arts, where Pericles had spoken and ruled—where Thucydides was then writing—where Socrates was then teaching—where Xenophon, Plato, and Isocrates, were receiving their education—and where the paintings of Parrhasius and Zeuxis, the sculpture of Phidias and Praxiteles, the architecture of Callicrates and Ictinus, and the sublime and chaste dramas of Sophocles and Euripides, formed the delight of the people.”—*Mitford's Greece*, c. 17.

Mr. Mitchell's portraiture of the Athenians at the same period is as follows. “Cruel and capricious, alternately tyrants and slaves—at once sharpers and dupes—devoted to the lowest of their appetites—gluttonous and intemperate—idle amid all their activity, and sensual amid privation and poverty, the life of the common Athenians exhibits a picture at once ridiculous, loathsome, and fearful, and shows the extreme corruption to which a state may be rapidly conducted by the united influence of republicanism and demagogues.”

Eumenides formed parts of a trilogy, of which the Agamemnon was the first member. The Persæ was also one member of a trilogy, and the same may probably be true of the Suppliants.

The plot of the Prometheus is extremely simple, but it is throughout a splendid poem. The interest entirely depends upon its original and expressive delineation of the individual character of Prometheus, a giant of the Titanic race, who forms a prominent figure in the earlier traditions of Grecian mythology, and in whose history some obscure references may be traced to the scriptural account of the fall of Man, or of the dispersion at Babel. The scene is laid on the borders of the ocean among the crags of Caucasus, to one of which Prometheus is chained, by order of Jupiter, in punishment of rebellious opposition to his will. Strength and Force, whom the poet has boldly personified, are the instruments of his sufferings, which he endures in a spirit of stern independence, and of lofty defiance of the powers of the Thunderer,

“ With courage never to submit or yield.”

The sombre character of this picture is relieved by the entry of a chorus of sea-nymphs, and of old Oceanus, who condole with the sufferer and recommend submission. His anguish on the one hand, and unbending fortitude on the other, are placed in powerful contrast, and his colloquy with the chorus is fraught with passages equally sublime and poetical.

The character of Prometheus is sustained to the last with undiminished force of colouring. Even when the thunders and lightnings of vengeance roar and flare around him, and the earth gapes at his feet, his voice is still heard, as he descends into the abyss, uttering amidst the convulsions of nature defiance to his tormentor.

The episode of Io ought not to pass unnoticed as an indefensible violation of the unity of action in this tragedy.

The "Seven Chiefs before Thebes," founded on the story of Eteocles and Polynices, was a very favourite piece both with the Grecian public and its author. It is rather a melodrama than a regu-

lar tragedy. In glowing lyrical inspiration, in energy of sentiment and expression, in picturesque imagery and description, it is not surpassed by any drama ancient or modern. Perhaps the spirit and energy of Dryden's *Alexander's Feast* may best convey to English readers an idea of the fire, and life, and varying style of its choruses, which, with the aid of appropriate voices and music, must have produced on the auditors no ordinary impression and excitement. Plutarch quotes a saying of Gorgias the sophist, that Mars not Bacchus inspired this splendid drama.*

The subject of "the Suppliants" is the landing of Danaus and his daughters in Argos, and the incident principally turns upon the question, whether or not Pelasgus and his subjects will receive them hospitably. The descriptive passages are picturesque, and the dialogue is animated. The daughters of Danaus compose the chorus, and their supplicating strains are fraught with fine poetry and pious sentiment; but, on the whole, it

* Plut. Symp. Quæst. decima.

is a drama devoid of nice art in its construction, and a tragedy without a tragical conclusion.

Schlegel conjectures, and with much plausibility, that it is a disconnected member of a trilogy, the other parts of which were the *Danaiidæ* and the *Egyptians*, two dramas the names alone of which are preserved. If so, it might probably be intended by the poet as introductory to the tragical action of the piece which succeeded it, in which case we are devoid of the just materials of candid criticism.

There is more of nice art in the development of the plot of the *Coephoræ* than in most of the dramas of *Æschylus*. But a close comparison between it and the *Electra* of *Sophocles*, of which the subject is the same, will forcibly illustrate the improvements introduced by the latter into the structure of tragedy. In that of *Æschylus*, *Orestes* and *Electra* recognize each other almost immediately, and this discovery made, the catastrophe ensues with obvious facility; but in that of *Sophocles*, the interest of the reader is deeply excited by the suspension of this recognition, which leads on

to that well-known scene over the supposed ashes of Orestes, the pathos and tenderness of which are truly exquisite and defy translation. The concluding scene, in which Ægisthus on lifting the veil from the supposed corpse of Orestes is petrified at beholding the features of Clytemnestra, is one of the most tragic incidents that can well be imagined.

The introductory description in the Eumenides of Orestes seated as a suppliant at the altar of Apollo, at whose instigation he had slain his adulterous mother, yet haunted by the Furies in vengeance of the matricidal act, forms a most terrific picture, and illustrates the strange theology of the Greeks, who represented hapless mortals as the puppets of destiny, and yet punished them as though they were free agents.

The aspect and demeanour of these terrible daughters of night are sketched with a spirit and a mystery that recalls Shakspeare's wierd sisters. Popular superstition in classical, as in Gothic ages, conjured up the ghosts of the murdered to

haunt the steps of the murderer, so that the apparition of the stern shade of Clytemnestra invoking vengeance, is by no means out of keeping in this appalling picture. The *Eumenides*, like the *Suppliants* is without a tragic close. It greatly flags towards the conclusion. The presence of so many mysterious beings prepares the imagination for a corresponding catastrophe, so that the good humour into which the Furies are finally soothed by Minerva, and the polished style of panegyric in which they hail the land of Attica, and celebrate its fame, however gratifying to Athenian vanity, appears to all impartial criticism misplaced and incongruous.

The subject of the *Persæ* is the triumph of confederated Greece over the vast force collected by Xerxes for its subjugation. The scene is laid in Persia. It commences by a fine description of the magnitude of the invading host, and the splendor of the armies and chiefs composing it, mingled with expressions of the deepest anxiety as to their fate. This strain is interrupted by the appearance of a

Persian messenger, who announces the dreadful catastrophe of its complete rout. Atossa, the mother of Xerxes, and widow of Darius, and the chorus, break forth upon this intelligence into expressions of grief and lamentation. In the depth of their despair, they invoke the shade of Darius to appear, and to give them counsel. Magical rites are employed to raise the spirit of the departed monarch, who obeys the summons, and, after uniting in their sorrows, advises that no further attempt be made to subjugate Greece. But his entry and departure, though not wholly devoid of mystery and thrilling accompaniments, are too much in the style of an ordinary mortal, and nothing results from the incident sufficiently important to account for resorting to such supernatural agency.

The arrival of Xerxes, who gives vent to furious grief, concludes the piece. There is no great art in the construction of this drama, nor any particular merit in the dialogue. But it has one passage

fraught with the highest interest, from its giving a more spirited and lively description than is elsewhere to be found of the great naval victory of Salamis.

The main facts closely accord with the narrative of Herodotus, but they are here invested with the bright hues of poetry, which has seldom kindled into enthusiasm in memory of a martial exploit more glorious or more momentous in its consequences. The war song of the Greeks, supposed to burst forth simultaneously from the commingling voices of the heroes who crowded their ships as they approached the Persian line, so much resembles in spirit and sentiment those heart-stirring appeals to national patriotism and valour of which there are such striking examples in their historians and orators, that we can hardly doubt that it was the very song of that memorable day. Potter has translated it with spirit, and the following is a specimen.

“ Night advanced,
But not by secret flight did Greece attempt

T'escape ; the morn, all beauteous to behold,
 Drawn by white steeds, bounds o'er the enlightened
 earth ;

At once from every Greek with glad acclaim
 Burst forth the song of war, whose lofty notes
 The echo of the island-rocks returned,
 Spreading dismay through Persia's hosts, thus fallen
 From their high hopes : no flight this solemn strain
 Portended, but deliberate valour bent

On daring battle, whilst the trumpet's sound
 Kindled the flames of war : but when the oars
 (The pæan ended) with impetuous force
 Dashed the resounding surges, instant all

Rush'd on in view, * * * *
 * * * * and now distinct we heard

From every part the voice of exhortation—

‘ Advance, ye sons of Greece, from thralldom save
 ‘ Your country,—save your wives, your children save,
 ‘ The temples of your gods, the sacred tombs,
 ‘ Where rest your honoured ancestors : this day
 ‘ The common cause of all demands your valour.’ ”

The only tragedy which it remains for us to
 notice is the Agamemnon, a translation of which
 is attempted in the following pages.

Not only does it manifest the powerful sway of

its author over the sources of pity and terror, but the superior skill which he occasionally displayed in the construction of his dramas, for it exemplifies by strict unity of action the grand law of Aristotelian criticism—in other words, it exhibits a marked beginning, middle, and end.

The opening speech of the watchman, invoking the fiery signal, so long expected, of the fall of Troy, and its sudden appearance, form a highly picturesque introduction to the subsequent scenes.

The arrival of the herald, which dissipates all doubt as to the import of the signal, and his feelings of pious delight at finding himself again on Grecian soil, which deny utterance for some moments to the glorious intelligence, give continuity to the preceding action, and are in themselves touching incidents.

The return of Agamemnon, the illustrious head of the Grecian confederacy, covered with glory, to the city and throne of his ancestors, forms an imposing central point in the drama, and renders the speedy occurrence of his ignominious death

doubly tragic, by the striking contrast of a rapid transition from the pinnacle of fortune to its lowest degradation. He is painted as the dignified monarch, and the wise man, no less than the heroic chieftain. His experience of the fickleness of fortune, and of the trials of life, has chastened every proud or haughty feeling in the retrospect of his triumphs, communicating to his sentiments a wise moderation, which blends affection with the awe inspired by his loftier qualities.

Clytemnestra's character wants a little softening to bring it within the verge of human sympathies. She is too implacably hypocritical and perfidious. Even the Lady Macbeth of our great dramatist appears human when she shrinks for a moment from her stern purpose at the sight of features which remind her of her father, and after the bloody deed has been perpetrated at her instigation, she pines beneath the stings of a guilty conscience; but in Clytemnestra there are no such relentings—even her allusions to Iphigeneia have nothing in them of real tenderness, and to the

last she glories in her crimes with a savage ferocity.

But the part of Cassandra forms the surpassing beauty of this drama. It is as original in conception as it is perfect in execution. Plato has said of Homer that he was the first of tragedians,* by which he meant that many of the characters and incidents of his poems furnish fruitful subjects for the finest tragedies. But neither the *Iliad* nor the *Odyssey* could have suggested to Æschylus the materials of his Cassandra. They emanated from the glowing conceptions of his own brilliant and excited fancy. As a beautiful and captive princess, the daughter of Priam and the sister of Hector, we are prepared to take a deep interest in her fate, but that interest becomes blended with awe, admiration, and terror, when she is viewed in her loftier character, that of the frenzied and inspired prophetess, whose eye glances on the dark

* καὶ ξυγχωρεῖν Ὅμηρον ποιητικώτατον εἶναι, καὶ πρῶτον τῶν τραγῳδιοποιῶν.—*Plato de Repub. lib. x.*

page of destiny, and who sketches what she reads there by appalling figures and by expressive imagery.

When attention is first excited towards her, she appears dejected, statue-like, and overwhelmed by sorrow. Clytemnestra, after vain endeavours to extract answers from her to various questions harshly put, irritated by her inflexible silence, disdainfully retires, when, after a few moments, the tongue of the prophetic princess becomes unloosed, and she petrifies or thrills the chorus by her wild and boding exclamations.

The past crimes of the house of Atreus, depicted in terrific visions, throng her excited imagination, and she points, by enigmatical allusions, or expressive imagery, to its future fortunes.

The bloody banquet given by Atreus to his brother Thyestes, at which the flesh of his own children, murdered by Atreus in a spirit of implacable revenge, was served up among the festive meats, draws down on Agamemnon according to the retributive ideas of the Greeks, that vengeance

which his father had escaped. The spectral forms of those children exhibiting to view their entrails and their hearts, flit before the eye of her fancy, and hover over the parapets of the palace. Cassandra addresses their hapless forms in a strain of wild invocation; and at the same moment the mournful dirge of the Furies sounds like the knell of death in her ears, and forebodes the approach of new woes.

A change comes over the spirit of her dream. Fresh images, shifting in their form, and portending the approaching assassination of Agamemnon, by turns excite and terrify, animate and subdue her. Mingled with these dreadful allusions, are various touches of tenderness and feeling,

“softening the rugged brow
Of darkness till it smiles.”

The cadence of the verse in these plaintive passages assumes the flow of elegy, while the workings of the prophetic rage are depicted by impetuous language, by sudden transitions, and by

daring images. At length, exhausted by the violence of her own feelings, Cassandra quits the scene, when the cries of the dying Agamemnon from within, alarm and agitate the chorus. After a short pause they approach, and discover Clytemnestra standing over the corpse of her husband, still holding in her hand the bloody instrument of his death. Her haughty, implacable spirit is finely painted, so also are the indignant feelings, and resolute loyalty of the free-born Greeks. But from this point the tragedy degenerates into a prolixity of dialogue unexpected and tiresome.

On the whole it may justly be asserted of the *Agamemnon*, that had it been the sole production of its author, it would justly entitle him to a place in the foremost ranks of genius.

Perhaps the Bard of Gray has more of the rapt and inspired character of the Cassandra of *Æschylus* than any similar creation of poetic fancy in ancient or modern times. Johnson and Algarotti have supposed the Bard to be an imitation of the *Nereus* of Horace, and there is an obvious ground of comparison as respects the form in which the

respective prophecies are delivered, for in the one case, the fleet of Paris is arrested in its course by the prophetic warnings of the Sea-God, in the other, the triumphant march of Edward the First, by that of the Bard; but the prophecy of Nereus, though delivered in a dignified style, is a tame performance, compared with the Bard of Gray; the affinity between which and the Cassandra, though not formal, is, in more essential points, sufficiently striking, consisting in a strong resemblance between their daring transitions, their figurative allusions, their dark, but expressive hints, and their picturesque visions of past or future events. The familiarity of our English Pindar with the Greek poets is well known, and the train of thought, in one of the finest of his odes, that on Adversity, may be resolved into a chorus of Æschylus, as he has himself indicated by the prefixed motto.

A striking affinity might also be traced in various particulars between the exquisite portraiture of the frenzy of Dido, in Virgil, and that of Cassandra, though the obvious diversity of the class of feelings

under which each labours, allows not of a close or detailed comparison.

The French critics, appealing to Aristotle, have laid down such rigid rules for the strict observation of the unities of action, time, and place, and have been so severe on those who have neglected them, on Shakspeare especially, that it might naturally be supposed the Grecian philosopher had clearly and pointedly defined these to be essential canons of the drama. But nothing is less true. His mind was too liberal, and sagacious, thus severely to cramp the march of genius. He does contend for unity of action as indispensable—by which he means the selection of one leading incident or subject, to the able development and impressive conclusion of which all the events introduced shall be subordinate. But on the unity of place he says nothing, and, as respects the unity of time, he recommends, not insists,* that the action of a drama

* ἡ μὲν γὰρ (τραγωδία) ὅτι μάλιστα πειρᾶται ὑπὸ μίαν περίοδον ἡλίου εἶναι, ἢ μικρὸν ἐξάλλασσειν.—*Arist. de Poet.* sect. 12.

should appear to be comprehended within one revolution of the sun. *Æschylus*, though not an undeviating observer of the unity of action, in proof of which the episode of *Io* in the *Prometheus* has already been cited, appears by his existing dramas to have in general conformed to it: he seldom transgresses the unity of place, but he disregards the unity of time, when it can only be maintained by an undue sacrifice of the needful and impressive coincidences of his subject. Thus in the *Agamemnon*, a series of picturesque circumstances usher in the august return of that monarch to the palace of his ancestors; their succession does not strike the imagination as extravagant, though upon reflection it is obvious they could not have been crowded within the circle of Aristotle's allotted hours. It is the prerogative of such a genius as *Æschylus* or *Shakspeare* to exhibit the standard of allowable deviation from the arbitrary enactments of frigid criticism.

Having now detailed the principal facts which illustrate the rise and progress of Grecian Tragedy,

the author will take leave of his subject, by expressing an earnest hope that an accurate acquaintance with the Greek and Roman classics may never cease to be regarded by his countrymen as one of the most essential branches of a liberal education. They are the purest standards of taste and judgment in literary composition. No productions of mind, however ingenious, can command permanent admiration, or exercise a really useful influence, which conform not in their leading features to universal reason, truth, and nature. This conformity forms the talisman, by means of which those illustrious writers have satisfied the judgment, and delighted the imagination of the greatest men, in distant and in recent times, in the most civilized countries, and under every form of government and manners. Nature, it is true, may be represented under various, or even contrary aspects, and yet be nature still. There is a low and disgusting nature, which is the object of reprehension and abhorrence,—there is an ordinary degree of polish and cultivation to which she may

be raised by education and good society; but the idea is also present to every cultivated imagination of a nature purified from vulgarity and grossness, and elevated by all that is dignified, graceful and attractive, which is the just object of admiration and esteem. This is equally the case with respect to character, to art, to language, and to sentiment, and every approach to it is an approach to true taste, the first principles of which resolve themselves into refined nature and moral fitness. Now making all due allowance for the errors of heathenism, it was with this elevation of purpose and of aim that the most illustrious of the writers and artists of Greece thought and composed. It glows in their finest poetry, it animates their noblest oratory, it is imprinted on their most admired statues, it is the union of taste and learning with genius and invention, it is the *το καλόν* of the antient philosophy, the beau idéal of the finest writers on modern poetry and art.

Experience has fully proved the necessity of deferring to some such standards of authority as

the classical writers, in order to oppose an effectual check to that tendency towards literary barbarism, into which the public taste will be occasionally betrayed by the fatal splendor of brilliant but perverted genius.

There was a time when the glittering conceits of Cowley were more admired than the beautiful or sublime of Milton, and the antithesis of Hall or Donne than the graceful energy of Dryden. France has had its hôtel of Rambouillet, as England its æra of German sentimentality and French metaphysics.

Each of these examples of perverted taste produced in its day, on a considerable portion of the reading public, a temporary hallucination, and each had its train of imitators and admirers—but as the influence which they exercised was at variance with sound reason, and genuine passion, the spell by which the truth of nature was counteracted could not long subsist; the public recovered from the delusion, and if the works of any such writers are still buoyant on the stream of time, it is by the

force of distinguished excellence, separate from and in spite of the particular defects which have here been censured.

It forms not the least of the many advantages of true taste, that when its principles are once acquired, they communicate a corresponding charm to the exertions of the mind, wheresoever directed, and, like those tests in chemistry which discover the hidden qualities of bodies, detect as it were instinctively, the true and the false in the various compositions of genius.

Finally, it is not to be forgotten that our religion, and much of its history and its evidences, are enshrined in the learned languages, and that when the fundamental truths of Christianity were to be asserted and illustrated, the strenuous efforts of the great reformers were instantly directed to the cultivation of Grecian literature.

ADDENDA.

IN the list of authorities cited p. 73, relative to the mode of appointing choruses, the Oration of Demosthenes against Meidias ought to have been included. Besides confirming the general statements on this subject in the preceding pages, it contains a passage by which it appears that, in addition to the reward of a tripus conferred on the victorious chorus, its choregus was crowned and offered sacrifice:—*δῆλον ὅτι τὰς μὲν ἡμέρας ἐκείνας ας συνερχόμεθα ἐπὶ τὸν ἀγῶνα κατὰ τὰς μαντείας ταύτας, περὶ αὐτῶν σεφανέμεθα, ὁμοίως ὃ, τε μέλλων νικᾶν, καὶ ὁ πάντων ὕστατος γενήσεσθαι· τὴν δὲ τῶν ἐπινικίων ὑπὲρ αὐτῶν τοτ' ἤδη σεφανῆται ὁ νικῶν.*—*Demosthenes Tylori*, v. iii. p. 107.

The orator also (p. 94 & 109) refers to the possibility of bribing the judges, (vid. Dissertation, p. 69 & 87,) and to the ruinous prodigality of expense with which some of the choregi discharged their functions.

Page 76. In transfusing into the text the substance of the remarkable passage quoted from Athenæus, p. 76, the Author finds he has omitted an interesting fact stated in it by that author—viz. that the Athenians wrapped their faces in their mantles on the occasion referred to, *in order to conceal their sensations of grief from the foreigners who were present.*

Page 128, line 14. An accomplished scholar has remarked to the author, that the apparent contradiction (noticed p. 124, line 14) was probably in harmony with the Athenian belief of the real character of the *Eumenides*.

BY THE COURT OF THE DISTRICT

OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

IN REPLY TO THE REPORT OF THE

COMMISSIONER OF THE DISTRICT

AGAMNON.

AND THE REPORT OF THE

COMMISSIONER OF THE DISTRICT

OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

IN REPLY TO THE REPORT OF THE

COMMISSIONER OF THE DISTRICT

OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

IN REPLY TO THE REPORT OF THE

COMMISSIONER OF THE DISTRICT

OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

IN REPLY TO THE REPORT OF THE

COMMISSIONER OF THE DISTRICT

OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

(148)

SUBJECT OF THE DRAMA,

TRANSLATED FROM THE GREEK SCHOLIAST.

AGAMEMNON, on his departure for Troy, promised Clytemnestra, that, if he took the city, he would signify the event to her by a fire-signal. Clytemnestra, therefore, stationed a sentinel, hired for the purpose, who should be on the watch for the signal. On beholding it, he proclaims the intelligence. She sends for a number of the elders of the city, who compose the chorus, and informs them of the appearance of the signal. They immediately sing a triumphal hymn. Not long after Talthybius (the herald) arrives, and relates what had befallen the Greeks during the voyage. Soon after Agamemnon appears in a chariot: another chariot follows him, bearing the spoils and (the captive) Cassandra. He enters his mansion with

Clytemnestra. Cassandra, before she enters the palace, breaks forth into prophetic strains, predictive of her own death, of that of Agamemnon, and of the murder of his mother by Orestes. She then rushes forward, like one about to die, casting away her prophetic fillets. This portion of the drama is greatly admired, as highly calculated to awaken terror and pity. Æschylus is peculiar in this respect—that he has represented Agamemnon as slain on the scene.* He does not particularise the murder of Cassandra, but alludes to her as dead. He introduces Ægisthus and Clytemnestra summarily defending themselves concerning the murder; the one, on account of the sacrifice of Iphigenia, the other, on account of the miseries brought upon his father, Thyestes, by Atreus.

* Stanley conjectures the original reading was, under or behind the scene.

PERSONS OF THE DRAMA.

WATCHMAN.

AGAMEMNON.

CLYTEMNESTRA, his Wife.

CASSANDRA, Daughter of Priam.

HERALD.

ÆGYSTHUS, first Cousin of Agamemnon, and Paramour
of Clytemnestra.

CHORUS of Old Men.

The first of these is the fact that the
author of the work is not known.

CHAPTER I

The first of these is the fact that the
author of the work is not known.
The second is the fact that the
work is not known to be the work of
the author of the work.

The third is the fact that the
work is not known to be the work of
the author of the work.

The fourth is the fact that the
work is not known to be the work of
the author of the work.

The fifth is the fact that the
work is not known to be the work of
the author of the work.

The sixth is the fact that the
work is not known to be the work of
the author of the work.

The seventh is the fact that the
work is not known to be the work of
the author of the work.

The eighth is the fact that the
work is not known to be the work of
the author of the work.

The ninth is the fact that the
work is not known to be the work of
the author of the work.

The tenth is the fact that the
work is not known to be the work of
the author of the work.

The eleventh is the fact that the
work is not known to be the work of
the author of the work.

The twelfth is the fact that the
work is not known to be the work of
the author of the work.

The thirteenth is the fact that the
work is not known to be the work of
the author of the work.

SCENE I.

THE piece opens with the soliloquy of a watchman, who laments his hard fate in being forced to look out year after year for the appearance of the signal-fire.

WATCHMAN *speaks.*

GRANT me, ye gods, deliverance from these toils,
This annual watch, which, like a dog, I keep,
Placed on the summit of the royal house
Of the Atridæ—whence my eyes survey
The choir of nightly stars, and those bright orbs,
Regents* in heaven, whose daily changes bring

* The expression "*regents in heaven*"—λαμπροὺς δυνάστας—literally *shining rulers*, as applied to the sun and moon, is in the bold style of Oriental imagery, and has been imitated by some of our greatest poets. Thus Milton—

"First in his East the glorious lamp was seen,
Regent of day."

The Pythagorean principles of Æschylus, no less than

Winter and summer in their course to man.

The torch symbolical, the herald flame,

Long-promised signal of the fall of Troy,

I now look out for—so a woman wills

Of manly counsels,* anxious for th' event.

that taste for the sublime which his poetry displays, led to the contemplation of the celestial luminaries. In the Seven Chiefs he expressively calls the moon *νυκτος οφθαλμος*, *the eye of the night*. In the same spirit Shakspeare, in Richard II., calls the sun, “the searching eye of heaven,” and Milton, in the Morning Hymn, “the world’s eye and soul.” It is interesting to trace these parallelisms of language and feeling between the great poets of ancient and modern times.

* *Of manly counsels*. The corresponding words in the original, *ἀνδρόβουλον κέαρ*, have been variously interpreted, but Bishop Blomfield has so clearly established the sense given in the translation by parallel expressions from other Greek authors, that no farther defence of it is necessary than a reference to his note. Schutz adduces a line from the Agamemnon, in which the same idea respecting Clytemnestra is conveyed in other words:—

Γύναι κατ’ ἄνδρα σώφρον’ εὐφρόνως λέγεις.—l. 342.

When on my toilsome dew-bespangled couch
 I lie, unvisited by dreams, pale fear
 Chases sleep's airy form, who fain would steep
 These weary eye-lids in forgetfulness.
 And if to sing or hum some soothing tune
 My lips essay, to charm the live-long hours,
 Sighs then oppress me ; and, with tearful eyes,
 The altered fortunes of this house I mourn—
 Not now, as heretofore, by wisdom governed.
 Oh ! that the signal of my finished cares,
 The joy-diffusing light would cleave the gloom.

[The promised signal suddenly appears.]

Torch of the night, thrice hail ! thy rays emit
 A splendor like the morn ; at thy behest
 The Argive youth, oblivious of past woe,
 Shall thrid with airy feet the mazy dance.
 From my own lips great Agamemnon's wife
 Shall hear the tidings, that, with eager haste
 Her couch deserting, she may bid these walls
 Ring with triumphal songs in glad acclaim
 Of the bright beacon : if, as it proclaims,

Ilion be prostrate, I myself will dance
 As in the prelude to some festival.
 Fortune at length upon our rulers smiles;*
 The die is cast of glorious victory.
 Oh! may I greet the master of this mansion
 On his return, and clasp his hand in mine.
 The rest unuttered be—my tongue is chained;†

* “ *Fortune at length upon our rulers smiles;*
 “ *The die is cast of glorious victory.*”

The words in the original may be thus translated:—
 I shall prosperously conclude the business of my employers, this blazing forth of the torch being to me like a lucky throw of three times six—a metaphor taken from a game in which three dice were used, and the lucky throw was when they all turned up with six upon the face. Such allusions, it is obvious, admit not of literal translation.

† The expression “my tongue is chained,” if rendered literally would be, *a great ox has mounted on my tongue*—βοῦς ἐπὶ γλώσση μέγας βέβηκεν. Commentators have differed much on the origin of so strange a proverb or metaphor. Some have derived it from a species of money current in Attica, bearing the impression of a bull or ox, and suppose the watchman

Could these walls speak, they'd tell a fearful tale ;*
 My thoughts 'mid those who know the fatal truth
 Seek not concealment, elsewhere I am mute.

CHORUS I. I.

The tenth year rolls away†
 Since Priam's vengeful foes, th' heroic pair
 From Atreus sprung, (who the dread symbols wear,
 Jove's gift, of sovereign sway,)
 Great Menelās, and Agamemnon, bore
 To Ilion, from Achaia's shore
 The hurricane of war; their martial train,
 Freighting a thousand ships, rode proudly o'er the
 main.

to hint, that, if he spoke out, he should be fined; others that he was bribed to be silent.—Menander, as quoted by Athenæus, uses the same proverb.—*Vide* Schutz.

* He alludes to the adulterous crime of Ægysthus and Clytemnestra, of which he was not ignorant.

† The chorus, composed of old men of Argos, and who as yet are not made acquainted with the intelligence of the fall of Troy, indulge throughout this introductory chorus in desultory allusions to the events of the war, and lament the listlessness of their own existence.

I. II.

Like vultures, that on high,
With clamorous grief the rifled nest above,
Where long they watched their young with tenderest love,

In eddying circles fly.*

But sylvan Pan, or Phœbus god of day,

Or Jove, supreme in sovereign sway,
Touched by their plaintive wail and piercing cry,
To scourge the guilty bids the fury fly.

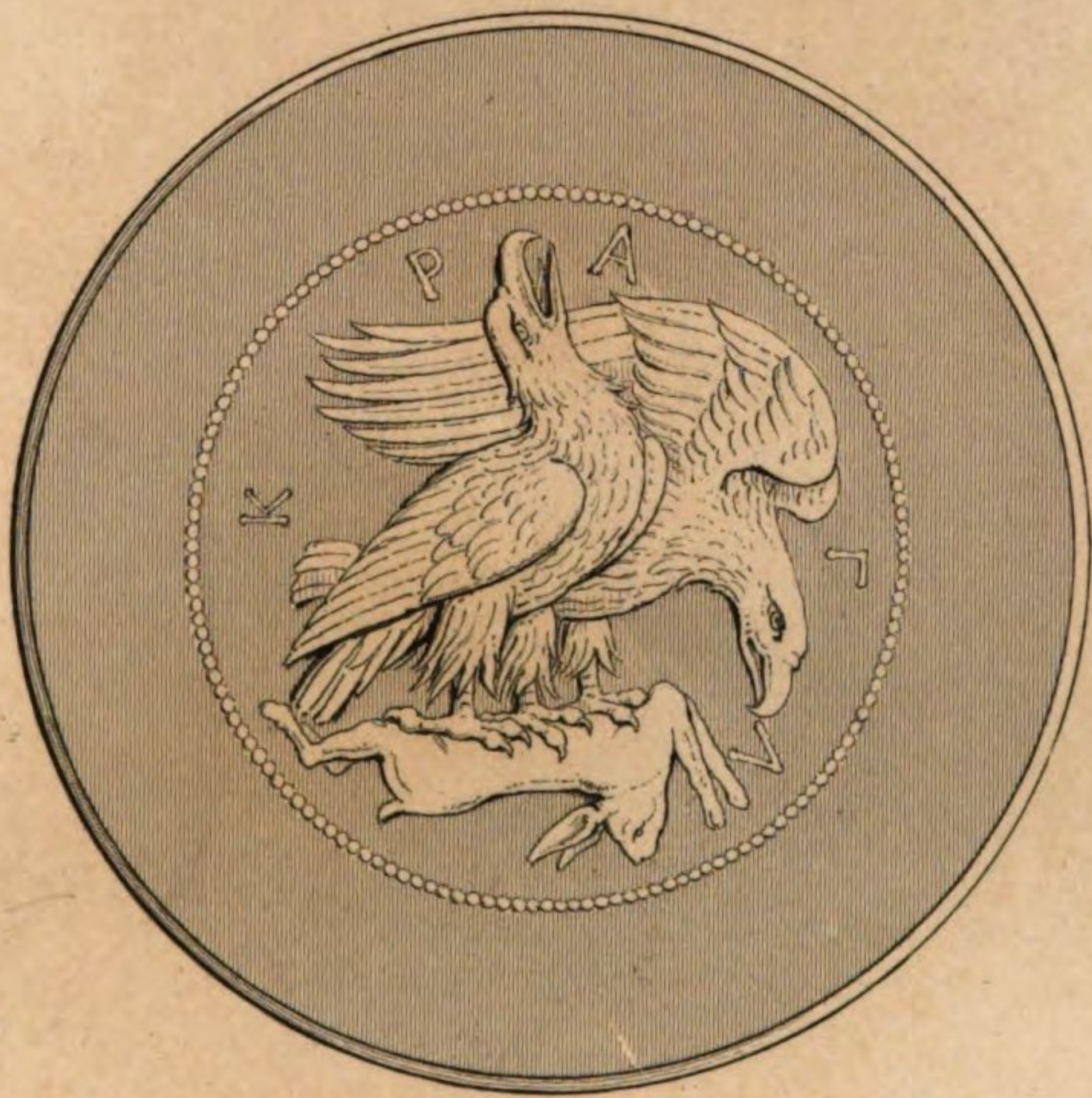
I. III.

Thus th' Atridæ's might
Jove, guardian of each hospitable rite,

Against the perjured Paris sent,
To Greece and Troy awarding furious strife—

For the oft-wedded faithless wife,
With shivering of spears, and knees in contest bent.

* *In eddying circles fly*—literally rendered, the Greek is, “rowing round with the oars of their wings.”



to face pa. 160

II. I.

Relentless Fate combines
Her schemes, which nought can alter—tears are
vain.

Nor cries, nor offerings, pardon can obtain
For the neglected shrines.

But we, who now her dread decrees proclaim,
When blazed war's carnage-waking flame,
At home were doomed the tedious hours to wear,
Or infant-like on staves our tottering forms to bear.

II. II.

For weak as infancy
Old age creeps forth, to vent its listless moan—
Withered its leaves, its martial ardour flown,

A dream, a vacancy!

But tell us, royal Clytemnestra, born
Of Tyndarus, what fame this morn
Thine ear has reached? why blaze these fires on
high,
Surmounting the proud fanes and reddening all the
sky?

II. III.

Rich clouds of incense shed
 Soft perfume, from the royal storehouse fed:
 Oh! deign to speak, and chase away
 The alternations quick of hope and fear,
 Which now my anxious bosom cheer—
 Now bid cold doubt arise, and quench hope's kind-
 ling ray.

STROPHE.

I hail her call;* th' inspiring muse
 My fancy wakes, and fires my views—

* "*I hail her call.*" The beauties and the obscurities of this choral ode are both conspicuous. Potter quotes Brumoy's despairing reference to its difficulties of construction and allusion—"l'on peut bien défier toute plume Françoise de rendre ce morceau, tant il est défiguré et entortillé." Abler scholars than Brumoy have been reduced to make similar complaints with respect to some of its passages. Butler, for instance, after citing the different order of the words, and the readings proposed by Heath and Schutz for the introductory strophe, finishes by designating it "*locus vexatissimus.*" The prophetic style in which a great

Rich clouds of incense staid
 Soft perfume, from the royal storehouse led:
 Oh! digne to speak, and chase away
 The alternate sick of hope and fear,
 Which late up from my bosom chert --
 Now but a faint, and even hope's kind-

I felt the rest of my aspiring muse
 By thy words, and thus my view --

"I am myself." The beauties and the character
 of the poem are too well conspicuous. Pater quotes
 Schlegel's reference to its difficulties of style
 and its "difficulties." "I am peut bien dire que
 l'œuvre est difficile et étroite, tant il est
 difficile de rendre l'âme." After which that Pater
 have been content to make similar comparisons with
 respect to some of its passages. Further, he remarks
 after citing the different order of the stanzas, and the
 readings proposed by Heath and Schütz for the
 introductory strophe, finished by designating it "a
 symposium." The prophetic style is a great



Rekindles youth in every vein,
And rouses memory's pictured train.

Bright were the omens, when the flow'r
Of Greece the sceptred brothers led,
On vengeance bent, elate with pow'r,
Ilion, thy fated shores to tread:
Jove's royal bird was on the wing
To urge their martial mustering.
Two eagles, with impetuous flight
Descending from the fields of light,
Shot towards the right* their airy way,
In front of that bright host's array.

portion of it is composed necessarily involves abrupt transitions and enigmatical allusions, two great sources of obscurity;—besides which the text itself is in some passages incurably corrupted.

* *Shot towards the right*—literally, in the direction of the hand which brandishes the spear — *χερὸς ἐκ δοριπάλτου*—i. e. the right hand: Milton, so rich in classical allusions, uses a synonymous figure.

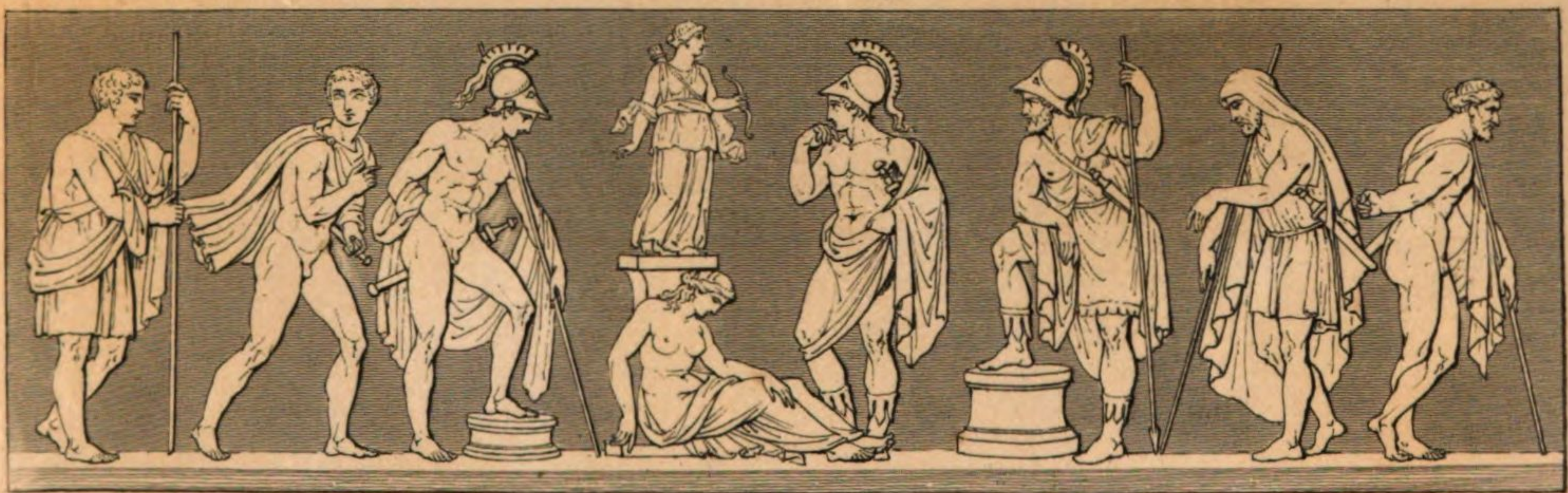
“As flame they part,
Half wheeling to the shield, *half to the spear.*”

Sable the one, the other bore
 Plumage of snowy white behind;
 The royal tent they hovered o'er;
 Their talons bloody spoils entwined—
 A hare's* young offspring, fiercely torn
 From the maternal womb ere born.—
 Pour forth deep notes of plaintive woe—
 But still, let smiling hope with views of conquest
 glow.

ANTISTROPHE.

The prophet of the host, whose eye
 Could pierce through deep futurity,
 Beheld, depicted in this sign,
 The fortunes of the chiefs divine;

* *A hare's young offspring, &c.* The passage in the original has much employed the diligence of critics and commentators, owing to its somewhat confused reference, in the same breath, to the foetus of the hare, and the hare itself. The eagles had seized a pregnant hare, and lacerated not only it, but the foetus in its womb. The construction of the words, as proposed by Bishop Blomfield, includes this double sense, and, without admitting it, the Greek text is all confusion.



Then quick to the Atridæ turning,
 'Mid the bright host assembled round,
 Eyes with prescient fury burning,
 He thus the mystic spell unbound:
 Time urges on the destined hour;—
 The gathering clouds of battle lour:
 Lo! Priam's city bends to fall;
 The martial troops that guard her wall,
 And all her treasured stores, await
 Th' un pitying stroke of ruthless Fate.

But oh! beware, lest, when that town
 Reluctant wears the captive chain,
 Some god assume a withering frown,
 And conquest's crested honours stain.
 Diana's wrath this house must feel—
 Eagles,* she hates your bloody meal.—

* *Eagles, she hates, &c.* The Greek literally says, that she (Diana) is incensed against the winged dogs—i. e. the eagles of her father. The term winged dogs, or griffins, for eagles, is one of those extravagances of

Pour forth deep notes of plaintive woe—
 But still, let smiling hope with views of conquest
 glow.

EPODE.

The radiant goddess of the chace
 O'er the fierce lion's infant race—
 O'er all the whelps of savage brood,
 That prowl within the umbrageous wood,
 Or roam the trackless desert's way,
 Extends her tutelary sway.
 These signs, which joy and terror blend,
 She urges to their destined end.
 Her menaced vengeance to allay,
 We hail the bright-eyed god of day,
 Lest to unloose the fleet wind-bound,
 Forbidden blood should taint this ground.
 Ye terrors, cease your restless sway—
 Away, dread sacrifice, away—

expression in which the wild fancy of Æschylus often indulged, and for which he is pleasantly rallied by Aristophanes in the "Frogs."

A daughter's blood for vengeance cries,*
 Glares frenzy in a mother's eyes :
 'Twas thus that Calchas could disclose
 Bright triumphs mixed with direful woes,
 For both his prescient eye surveyed,
 In the portentous birds displayed.
 Pour forth deep notes of plaintive woe,
 But still, let smiling hope with views of conquest
 glow.

I.

Great Jove, mysterious power!
 How shall we hail thee, throned supreme?
 How† speak thy name, deep cares devour
 My mind, while brooding o'er this theme,

* *A daughter's blood, &c.* The whole passage in the original is very obscure, from its prophetic and mysterious allusions to the approaching sacrifice of Iphigenia, the virgin daughter of Agamemnon, at the shrine of Diana, the dreadful price of unbinding the winds which detained the Grecian fleet at Aulis, after setting sail for Troy.

† *How speak thy name.* Many passages might be cited from the Greek poets, illustrative of the super-

So wrapped in night, thoughts, fancy rove
In vain, a name to find that more befits than Jove.

II.

He* who towered once elate,
Lowered his crested pride to thee,
Nor dared the second foe await,
Thy arm of three-fold victory;†

stitious dread of the Heathen, lest they should offend
their deities by unacceptable names or invocations.

Milton, in his address to Light, conforms to the
spirit of such passages,

“ May I express thee *unblamed*, since God is light.”

* *He who towered, &c.* The throne of Jupiter was
fabled to have been founded on the ruins of the dynasty
of an elder race of gods. Cœlus and Saturn it is sup-
posed are here alluded to. Schutz has cited from the
Prometheus a similar passage, in which the rebel giant
is made to say he has seen two mighty deities pros-
trated before Jupiter, and yielding him the palm.—*Vide*
Prom. 955.

† *Thy arm of three-fold victory.* The expression in
the original is *τριακτῆρος*, a term applied to those who
had three times conquered in gymnastic games, and
here metaphorically used to designate Jove as eminently
victorious.

Wisdom's bright palm is his, who to the praise
Of Jove triumphant breathes harmonious lays.

EPODE.

Man, erring man,* by Jove is led
Reflection's sober path to tread;
In sorrow's softening hour,
He opes the portals of the soul
To wisdom's salutary power,
And bids affliction's sway, the passions wild con-
troul.

* *Man, erring man.* This portion of the chorus is highly interesting, not only from its pensive tone, and moral grandeur, but also as having apparently suggested to Gray the train of thought which pervades his beautiful Ode to Adversity. That he had this chorus in view is evident from his having prefixed, as the motto, the three fine lines, commencing,

Τὸν φρονεῖν βροτῆς ὁδὼ—

σαντα, τὸν πάθει, &c.

Dr. Johnson supposes him to have taken the hint from O Diva, gratum quæ regis Antium—but the connection is much less apparent in this case than the other.

Oft when the harassed body sleeps,
 Forth memory clothed in vision creeps,
 And bids the humbled mind revere,
 The rigid means by Heaven assigned,
 To check presumption's mad career,
 And by the balm of woe to purify the mind.
 Such discipline th' immortal gods decree,
 High seated on their thrones in glorious majesty.

STROPHE.

Where gently flows the refluent tide,
 Aulis, around thy winding bay,
 Whence Chalcis smiles in sunny pride;
 By adverse winds imprisoned, lay
 The fleet, o'er which the sceptered hand
 Of great Atrides waved command.
 Vainly to break the spell he sought,
 Day glided after day, yet no deliverance wrought.

ANTISTROPHE.

The chief, though much by grief impelled,
 Stifled the workings of his soul,
 All fruitless bursts of passion quelled,
 By sovereign reason's wise controul,

Nor blamed the prophet; though the flower
Of Greece sunk under famine's power,
And furious gales from Strymon tore
The cables of the ships, and strewed with wrecks
the shore.

STROPHE.

But when the heaven-instructed seer
Announced Diana's stern decree,
The remedy proved more severe,
More baleful than the storm-bound sea.
While of her ruthless ire he spoke,
Tears fell, and sighs commingling broke
From th' Atridæ, each the ground
Touched with his sceptre, and the elder utterance
found.

ANTISTROPHE.

Most cruel fate! shall then this hand
To barbarous rites my child consign,
Pride of my house, and shall I stand
To view her life-blood stain this shrine?
Yet glory calls—'tis mine to wield,
The sword, and rule the tented field,

My friends will not their murmurs quell,
Until a virgin's blood break the wind-holding spell.

STROPHE.

But when necessity's strong plea*
Had nature's yearning pangs repress,
Infuriate rage, impiety,
Boiled in the monarch's phrenzied breast:
The lovely fair was doomed to bleed,
Her sire the dreadful rites decreed,
To speed the moment which should land,
The slaughter-breathing host on Ilion's fated strand.

ANTISTROPHE.

In vain her supplicating shriek
Assails a father's ears—in vain
Her virgin form, her youth bespeak
Compassion from the warrior train:
He bids fierce ruffians 'neath the shrine
Place as a hind's that form divine;

* *But when necessity's strong plea, &c.* Vide the remarks on Necessity, p. 65 of the Essay.



in blue ink

My friends will not their murmurs quell,
Until a virgin's blood break the wind-holding spell.

STICHOMETER.

But when perturbed'st thy mind,
Had'st thou not seen the world's end?
Infernal rage, thy power
Brought forth from hell's own den,
The deadly life and death, the strife,
The war, the strife, the strife,
To sport the human soul, the strife,
The struggle, struggling, lost on life's cruel strife.

ANTISTROPHE.

In vain her supplicating shriek
Assails a father's ears—in vain
Her virgin form, her youth bespeak
Compassion from the warrior train:
He bids her refuge seek, the strife
There is a land, that strife divine.

* But when upstart'st a strong plea, &c. Vide the re-
marks on Necessity, p. 11 of the Essay.



to face pa. 156

The prayer ascends, the victim lies
 Wrapped in her flowing robe,* a destined sacrifice.

STROPHE.

She spoke not; words denouncing woe
 To all the host had utterance found,
 But the same hands which laid her low,
 Her beauteous lips with thongs had bound:
 Then from her arms, and heaving breast,
 Loosing her saffron-coloured vest,

* *Wrapped in her flowing robe, &c.* In this passage, Iphigeneia is described as so infolding herself in her robes that her position in death might consist with strict propriety. Euripides, as cited by Pawe, describes the same of Polyxena.—*Hec.* 567.

θνήσκεις ὅμως
 πολλὴν πρόνοιαν εἶχεν εὐσχήμως πεσεῖν.

Passages of a similar tendency are quoted by the same commentator from several of the Latin poets.

On each stern chief her gentle eye
 Shot forth expressive beams of suppliant energy.*

* *Shot forth expressive beams.* The Greek is remarkably touching.

ἔβαλλ' ἑκάστον θυτήρων
 ἀπ' ὀμματος βέλει φιλοίκτω

i. e. she pierced, with a pity-inspiring dart from her eye, each of the sacrificers. The poet, in this description of the mien and feelings of Iphigeneia is true to nature. He paints her as an unwilling and suffering, but a meek and patient victim. Euripides, on the contrary, in describing the same scene, transforms her into a lofty heroine, just suited to grace French tragedy, who joyfully welcomes a bloody death for the sake of her country and the army. Alfieri, always more of the rhetorician than the poet, has fallen into the same train of sentiment, for he makes Electra, when Clytemnestra is venting her grief for the loss of Iphigeneia, thus address her:—

oggi se il cielo
 Chiedesse pur d'una tua figlia il sangue,
 Oggi piena di gioja, all' ara io corro.

What a different Electra from that of Sophocles!

ANTISTROPHE.

Nought but some matchless artist's power*
 Could paint, in act to speak, her face,
 That face, which, in the festive hour,
 Had oft, with captivating grace,†

Lucretius has painted the scene more in the spirit of
 Æschylus.

Muta metu, terram, genibus submissa, petebat :
 Nec miseræ prodesse in tali tempore quibat,
 Quod patrio princeps donarat nomine regem :
 Nam, sublata virûm manibus, tremebundaque, ad aras
 Deducta est.—lib. i. 92.

* *Nought but some matchless artist's power, &c.* It is probable that in this allusion to the art of painting, the poet might have had in view some picture or group of this subject by a contemporary artist. That it was a favorite subject with the ancient artists is well known by existing gems and vases. The celebrated picture by Timanthes, in which Agamemnon was introduced among the chiefs of his army, with his head veiled, as if labouring under inexpressible grief, was of the age of Alexander.

† *Had oft with captivating grace.* The Greek text, corresponding with this passage, and commencing with

And songs in high triumphal strain,
 Hailed her loved father's happy reign.
 These eyes the sequel did not see;
 The prophet's words were truth—the rest unuttered
 be.

EPODE.

If justice, armed with terrors, rise,
 She frowns to make the sufferers wise;
 Since none can fly relentless fate,
 Why seek her depths to penetrate?
 Th' impending stroke of wrath to know,
 Were to anticipate our woe.
 Oh may th' eventful hours which lie
 Embosomed in futurity,
 Upon the Apian land with blessings rise,*
 True to the vows of those who sway her destinies.

the words *επει πολλακις πατρος*, v. 234, is obscure and difficult, and was left unintelligible by Stanley and Heath. Schutz was the first critic who, by pointing *αγνα* with the particle of the dative, and connecting it with *αυδα*, brought out a probable meaning without doing violence to the existing reading.

* Apian, i. e. Pelopponesian.



Flaxman delin

May the morn springing from the Womb of Night. &c.

page 173.

SCENE II.

CLYTEMNESTRA, CHORUS.

Chorus: Thy presence, Clytemnestra, I approach
With the respectful homage that should greet
My absent monarch's consort, his dear throne
Announces true tidings, or thy high-souled hopes
False I would know, but that is impossible.

Cl. May the sun, springing from the east at
night,

Rise bright with smiling fortunes on this land:
Listen to tidings bright beyond our hopes,
The conquering Greeks in Priam's city reign.

Ch. What words are these.—I scarce can credence
yield.

Cl. That Troy is won, can words more plainly
speak?

Ch. These tears attest the fervour of my joy.



SCENE II.

CLYTEMNESTRA, CHORUS.

Chorus. THY presence, Clytemnestra, I approach
With the respectful homage that should greet
My absent monarch's consort; do these rites
Announce true tidings, or thy high-wrought hopes?
Fain I would know, but fear to importune.

Cl. May the morn, springing from the womb of
night,

Rise fraught with smiling fortune on this land:
Listen to tidings bright beyond our hopes,
The conquering Greeks in Priam's city reign.

Ch. What words are these.—I scarce can credence
yield.

Cl. That Troy is ours, can words more plainly
speak?

Ch. These tears attest the fervour of my joy.

Cl. Thine eyes are faithful to thy loyal feelings.

Ch. But whence proceeds this confidence of hope?

Cl. From plainest proofs, unless the gods deceive.

Ch. Dost thou give credence to persuasive dreams?

Cl. The slumbering's mind's delusions rule not me.

Ch. Haply thy faith some flying rumour sways.

Cl. Why treat me as a young enthusiast?

Ch. When did destruction lay the city low?

Cl. The very night that ushered in this morn.

Ch. But what winged messenger the fact proclaimed?

Cl. Vulcan from Ida's top, in circling flame ;

Torch answered torch, till here the signal flew :*

First Ida to th' Hermæan crag which crowns

* The practice of conveying intelligence by fire-signals existed in Greece before the age of Homer, vide *Iliad*, book xviii. There is a remarkable passage in Herodotus, (*Calliope* 3,) which states that when Mardonius was approaching Athens, he formed the project of informing the Persian king of its capture, by means of torches or fires, (*πυρροισι*), dispersed at certain distances along the intervening islands.

So when the Piræus was to be attacked during the Pelopponesian war, Thucydides describes the approach

The sea-girt Lemnos; next the herald blaze
 Reached Athos, sacred seat of sovereign Jove.
 Triumphant thence, borne on the foaming waves,
 Whose wreathing tops it tipped with lambent
 beams,
 Th' advancing light, effulgent as a sun,

of the enemy as announced to Athens by the waving of lights (*φρυκτοι*), from Salamis, lib. ii. 94; and during the siege of Plataea, the besieged counteracted the signals of the besiegers, by waving torches in an opposite direction. See also Virgil, *Æneid*. ii. 256, and Polybius, x. 43.

A geographical question has been raised as to the possibility of transmitting a signal by fire from Mount Ida to Argos, by means of the successive stations enumerated. Vossius, as quoted by Pawe, maintains the affirmative, so does Casaubon, as cited by Butler, and he answers the question by the following computation, Mount Ida to Lemnos 70,000 paces, thence to Mount Athos 50,000. The exact spot meant by Macistus is doubtful, probably it was part of Mount Pelion, or Ossa, or else of Telethrius, in Eubœa; let it be assumed at 30,000, thence to Cithæron, about the same distance. From Cithæron to Egiplanctus in Megaris 20,000, thence to Arachne 30,000, and finally to Mycænæ somewhat less than 30,000.

Poured on Macistus golden radiance.
 Reckless of sleep, impatient of delay,
 The fiery wonder moved—Euripus flamed
 With bright illumined waves, Messapus thence
 Caught the glad signal, and the stationed guard,
 Firing a heathy pile, the fervid blaze,
 Transmitted onwards with augmented power.
 The splendid conflagration wide diffused
 The glad intelligence, and bounding o'er
 Th' Asopian plain, bright as the full-orbed moon
 When at her noon of glory, lighted up
 Citheron's lofty head, enkindling there
 Responsive zeal, and corresponding fires;
 By generous rivalry the guard inspired,
 Bid the fierce blaze, with ever-gathering strength,
 Hold on its course, Gorgope's marshy plain
 Was all illumined: Ægiplanctus next
 Wore on his giant head the crown of flame.
 Up the proud steep, whence to the eye expands
 The gulf Saronic, next, the kindling power,
 Shaking its fiery tresses, soared sublime.*

* The Greek, literally rendered is "they sent on the vast fiery beard of flame."

Th' adjoining post, Arachne's craggy height,
 It scaled, it reddened o'er; the light derived
 From Ida's top thus finally diffused
 Its beamy splendour o'er the royal house
 Of the Atridæ: thus it reached our shores.
 Torch kindled torch successive, but my heart
 Of these the first and last most warmly hails.*

Ch. Lady, my vows are eager to ascend,
 In gratitude to heaven, but let thy lips
 Repeat once more the glad intelligence.

Cl. The Greeks triumphant reign this day in Troy:
 What sounds conflicting in her streets are heard!
 Should'st thou on vinegar soft unguents pour
 Th' opposing streams would separate, not blend.
 Not less opposed the cries distinct which mark
 The victors and the vanquish'd; pale in grief,
 Stretched on the cold remains of slaughtered friends,

* *Of these the first and last, &c.* That is to say, I particularly hail the first torch as the original transmitter of this joyful news, and the last as its final transmitter to this city.

Wives, sisters weep, and children o'er their sires
 Extend in mute despair their captive arms.
 The victors, breathing from the toil severe
 Of nightly conflict, range the streets for food,
 Or in the captured palaces of Troy,
 As chance directs their steps, woo soft repose.
 May no insatiate lust of things forbidden
 O'ercloud their flattering prospects; half their course
 Is unaccomplished yet—their safe return.
 Should they escape long wanderings o'er the deep,
 Who knows but tardy justice yet may claim
 Atonement for the blood profusely shed?
 Forgive these bodings of a female mind:
 May fortune smile and crown my every joy.

CHORUS.

Hail, sovereign Jove! hail, friendly night
 With robe of starry lustre bright!*

* *With robe of starry lustre bright.* The original words are—*μεγάλων κόσμων κτεάτειρα*. This passage is very obscure. The turn given to it in the translation

Aided by thee, the net of fate*
 Was cast o'er Troy's devoted state;
 Her towery strength, her martial throng,
 Youth, age, the helpless, and the strong,
 All sunk enthralled; red slaughter woke,
 And vengeance framed the captive yoke.
 Thee, Jove, whose ire the wretch o'ertakes
 Who hospitable pledges breaks,

was first suggested by Stanley. The word *κόσμος* is frequently applied to express the glories of the starry heavens, and Bentley, in his *Phalaris*, has shown that Pythagoras was the first who thus employed it: as Æschylus was a Pythagorean, he probably used it in the same sense. Schutz supposes that the words are not an apostrophe to night in general, but to the particular night in which Troy was taken; but there is nothing in the context which limits thus their application.

* *The net of fate.* This figure is in the bold style of oriental imagery, and accords with the similes used on similar occasions by the Hebrew prophets. Thus Ezek. xii. 13, in predicting the approaching captivity of Zedekiah, "My net also will I spread upon him, and he shall be taken in my snare, and I will bring him to Babylon."

I hail ; by thee directed flew
Th' unerring shaft* which Paris slew.

Their fate was sealed by Jove's decree,
The lightning of his vengeance scathed their race,
The doom before ordained, fulfilled we see,
And link by link the chain of causes trace ;
Perish their lore who dare deny
That o'er this world just gods preside,
Avengers of the violated tie,
And spurners of oppressive pride.

* *The unerring shaft, &c.* Nothing can be more obscure than the Greek original in this passage. Dr. Blomfield, after much learned investigation, abandons it to scholars to deal with as they can. The sentence is probably proverbial. A general meaning glimmers through it corresponding with the translation. It says, literally rendered, that the dart of Jupiter was not shot before the time, or above the stars. The French translator thus elegantly expresses it :—" Mais le trait n'est point parti avant le temps, et ne s'est point égaré dans les airs."

Of this fell race are they, ignobly great,
Who murder breathe, and tower in guilty state ;
Mine be the happy lot secure to glide
In calm content and peace down life's tumultuous
tide.

No refuge 'gainst the stroke of fate
Can riches yield to them whose feet profane,
Winged with presumption, dare to violate
The shrine of justice, and pollute her fane ;
Their course blind frenzy sways,
Shines on their path delusive light,
Like brass, which, proved, a dark alloy betrays,
Fades the meteor glare in night ;
Thoughtless as boys who urge the feather'd race,
They work their country's and their own disgrace ;
In vain to heaven they look when stung with fear,
The angry gods refuse their vows to hear.

Thus Paris when an honoured guest
At the Atridæ's hospitable board,
Faithless and perjured more, the more carest,
Beguiled the beauteous Helen from her lord.

Ah, faithless wife! Greece in that hour
 Manned fleets for thee, and shone in arms;
 And by thy presence Troy in place of dower
 Saw ruin brought, and war's alarms.
 Then with forebodings deep, each prophet's tongue
 In sad and melancholy numbers sung—
 How, whilst long years should urge their destined
 sway,
 The harassed state must mourn, to countless ills a
 prey;

Oh! royal house,* oh! nuptial bed
 To her who flies her lord's embrace, once dear:
 She's sought in vain, a spectre's form instead
 The palace haunts, and reigns in silence drear;†

* *Oh! royal house, &c.* It has been a question who the prophets here referred to were—whether Trojan or Grecian. With Dr. Blomfield, Schutz, and Heath, we incline to the latter opinion; for it has been justly asked, how was the chorus at Mycenæ to know what the Trojan prophets had said or sung on occasion of Helen's flight.

† *She's sought in vain, &c.* One clause of this beautiful



ερρελ πασ' Αφροδιτα

vide Note page 173.

The power of the Greek gods
Which raised them from the dead
Is hardly to be seen, and yet some place
To wounded gods and that the power
Restoring them of old their place
And a language, in which the power of the

power of the Greek gods is seen, and yet some place
To wounded gods and that the power
Restoring them of old their place
And a language, in which the power of the
power of the Greek gods is seen, and yet some place
To wounded gods and that the power
Restoring them of old their place
And a language, in which the power of the

" *potenza maggior d'iove,*
che ruscava del tempo felice
Nella nostra." Ist. x. 121.

* *Jay goes place, &c.* The Creek is *Uden* also
Agoltra, where *Aphrodite*, *Penny*, is put for *grace*, at
church.



The polished statue's magic grace,
 Which imaged forth her loveliness,
 Is hateful to his eyes, and joy gives place*
 To wounded pride and deep distress.
 Enchanting scenes of airy bliss arise,
 Grief's forgeries, to cheat his sleeping eyes :

strophe in the original is incurably corrupt, (παρεστι
 σιγασ' ατιμος, &c.) and has defeated the conjectural
 emendations of the ablest critics. The allusion to the
 statues or busts of Helen which adorned the royal palace
 may be cited as a proof of the prevalence of such orna-
 ments in Grecian houses in the age of Æschylus. In the
 heroic age, if busts were elaborated at all, they must
 have been sad caricatures of the human face divine.
 The anguish with which Menelaus is described as view-
 ing these memorials of days of happiness is very true
 to nature, and resembles a passage in Dante—

“ nessun maggior dolore,
 Che ricordarsi del tempo felice
 Nella miseria.” *Inf. x. 121.*

* *Joy gives place, &c.* The Greek is ἑρρεῖ πασ'
 Ἀφροδίτα, where Aphrodite, *Venus*, is put for grace, or
 charms.

He wakes—but seeks in vain those forms to clasp,
 Floating on sleep's light wings they shun his eager
 grasp.

Such griefs the royal house, and woes
 Still heavier curse, meanwhile through all her land,
 Greece pours the tributary tear for those,
 Who sought elate with hope the Trojan strand:
 Where are they? what returns to cheer
 The heart to hope deferred a prey?
 Ashes, to crown the sad funereal bier—
 Arms, from dead warriors reft away!
 These relics sad are all that Mars bestows
 Of heroes falling amid slaughter'd foes—
 Mars, who throughout the contest's wild career
 The doubtful scales displays, their balance-beam*
 a spear.

* The epithets here applied to Mars are very difficult either to understand or to translate. Heath interprets *ταλαντοῦχος*, “who weighs the events of battle,” “who holds the beam of victory.” It has been referred by





page 184. 7.5

The stricken heart, the sorrowing friend,
 Of each loved warrior's fame delights to tell;
 How one the soul of battle met his end,
 And for another's wife one glorious fell.
 Others, their solace in deep tones
 Of censure on th' Atridæ found,
 Or plaintive, wept for beauteous youths whose
 bones
 Had found a tomb on Trojan ground;
 Not less the general hatred sullies fame,
 Than if a solemn curse the state proclaim;*

others to the custom, prevailing in the Trojan war, of
 redeeming the bodies of the slain by money or pre-
 sents.

* *Not less the general hatred, &c.* Upon the mean-
 ing of this dark passage the best commentators have
 differed. The translation follows the note of Dr. Blom-
 field, which is to the following effect:—The breath of
 popular indignation carries with it the force of a pub-
 lic imprecation entered into by the city. This sounds
 very enigmatical, and the construction of the words is
 as puzzling as the sense is obscure. Probably the text
 is corrupted.

Visions of coming woe my heart affright,
For slaughter's gory deeds the gods requite.

Though fortune's smiles a transient blaze
Upon the impious oft may seem to shed,
Soon the pale furies quench those sparkling rays,
And bid the fickle power her path retread;
Pushed headlong from their lofty seat,
They pine beneath her adverse blast;
Against the proud, whom acclamations greet,
Jove's angry bolts full oft are cast.
Mine be a lot unenvied—far from me
The victor's wreath, the prisoner's fetters be;
Nor mine by slaughter won the envied throne,
Nor mine the dungeon's gloom where captives
vainly groan.

Fame through our streets with rapid flight
Proclaims the joy-announcing light;
But who shall say if truth divine,
Or falsehood glitters in this sign?

Childish that heart, that reason wild,
By such vague messengers beguiled :
One hour it swells with joy elate,
The next accuses adverse fate ;
Fiction to gloss with truth's bright hue,
And hail unborn events as true,
Is woman's part—but, vainly gay,
Quick the bright pageant flits away.

SCENE III.

CLYTEMNESTRA *enters*.—CHORUS.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Soon shall we know whether the bickering glare
Of these bright torches and successive lights
The truth proclaim, or, like some flattering dream,
Cheat us with vain delusive images.
From yonder strand behold a herald comes,
With boughs of olive he is shaded o'er.
The dust in clouds* around him marks his speed:
No distant signal now, no beacon's flame,
But mortal accents† shall our doubts relieve.

* *The dust in clouds, &c.* Literally rendered it would be, "the thirsty dust, sister of the mud, and closely connected with it."

† *But mortal accents, &c.* The commentators have differed much on the precise meaning of the words *ὡς οὐτ' ἀνάνδος*, &c. The true force of the words, we conceive, is attained, by regarding them as an allusion

His words will either swell our tide of joy,
Or—but away, all thoughts to hope opposed.
Brighter and brighter still may fortune smile.

Ch. Accursed be he who other wishes breathes.

SCENE IV.

HERALD *enters.*

CHORUS, HERALD, CLYTEMNESTRA.

HERALD.

Hail, Argos! hail, my much loved native land:
In this tenth year of absence I behold,
'Midst many frustrate hopes, one realised.
I ventured not to cherish the fond thought

to the herald flame, which, though a splendid and
striking, was *a dumb messenger*, whereas the living
herald, who was then in sight, Clytemnestra says, is *no*
dumb messenger, nor one that will signify the truth by
fiery signals, but by articulate sounds.

That here in Argive soil my bones would rest.*
 Loved soil, thrice hail ! refulgent orb of day !
 Jove, power supreme ! and thou, oh Pythian king,
 Pointing at us no more the arrowy death !
 Skamander's banks beheld thee long our foe ;
 But o'er us now, Apollo, spread once more
 Thy bright protecting shield : ye gods that guide

* The poet who is true to nature is the poet of all times and countries. This is one great source of the charm which attends the study of the great writers of antiquity. The voice of nature speaks in this speech of the herald, and his expressions of delight at finding himself again on the shores of his native land, and amidst objects inexpressibly dear to him by the tenderest ties of kindred and of country, represent the emotions of an unsophisticated and feeling mind, under similar circumstances, in every part of the world. Thus Homer, eminently the poet of nature, describes Agamemnon as melting into tears on again treading the soil of his beloved Argos.—

ἦτοι ὁ μὲν χαίρων ἐπεβήσετο πατρίδος αἵης
 καὶ κύνει ἀπτόμενος ἦν πατρίδα· πολλὰ δ' ἀπ' αὐτοῦ
 Δάκρυα θερμὰ χέοντ' ἐπεὶ ἀσπασίως ἴδε γαῖαν.

Odyss. iv. 521.

The fate of battles—Hermes, power benign,
 The herald's friend, the herald's favourite theme—
 And you immortal heroes, who our hosts
 Urged to the combat, on the scant remains
 Escaped the thirsty spear, propitious smile.
 Ye royal mansions of our kings, loved walls—
 Ye seats revered—ye deities that face*
 The orient sun and drink his golden rays—
 If on our king ye e'er have favouring smiled,
 Oh! welcome his return so long delayed;—
 Bright as the sun chasing the mists of night,
 His country's joy, great Agamemnon comes :
 Hail his approach; in him the chief behold,
 Jove's fated instrument, whose potent arm
 Has passed destruction's ploughshare over Troy.†

* *Ye deities that face, &c.* The herald here addresses himself to the deities or demons, i. e. the inferior race of gods, whose statues were placed in the open air, in shrines or on pedestals, towards the east. The expression in the original is, *δαίμονές τ' ἀντήλιοι*.

† *Has passed destruction's ploughshare, &c.* This image is quite in the style of the Hebrew prophets.

Prostrate in dust her shrines, her temples lie ;
 Extinct her race ; and with the captive chain
 Ilion now compassed, great Atrides bends
 Homeward his steps, with glory blazoned round.*
 Above all mortals be his praise proclaimed ;
 Nor Paris, nor th' associates of his guilt,
 Can boast their crime its punishment exceeds.
 Not only on the ravisher death preys ;
 His family, his country share that fate,
 Accumulated woes on Troy are hurled.
Cl. Welcome, brave herald, from th' Achaian host.
Her. Welcome those accents—death I reckon not now.
Ch. Have your fond feelings oft to home recurred ?
Her. These tears my deep emotions best pourtray.
Ch. Then you were stricken by that soft disease.
Her. I need some clue your meaning to attain.
Ch. Your kindly thoughts responded to our own.
Her. You say the army's longings imaged yours.

* The poet with great art exalts the glory of Agamemnon, to render the contrast of his approaching fate doubly tragic.

Ch. Yes, many a sigh of speechless grief I've heaved.

Her. What cause excited in you such dejection?

Ch. Silence, best solace of our woes has proved.

Her. In the king's absence were your fears alarmed?

Ch. So much, that death, to use thy words, were joy.

Her. The end is well achieved, but our long years

Of absence, chequered all throughout have been

With mingled joy and grief: who but the gods

The privilege of bliss unchanging know?

The perils of our passage shall I paint,

The reefs we crost? how rarely we attained

A friendly port, ev'n then, how hardly fared?

Successive trials marked each lingering hour;

Landed, to heavier evils we were doomed:

Our couch, the earth's cold lap, 'neath hostile walls;

The adverse skies, the neighbouring marshes breathed

Pernicious dews, whose fleecy moisture robbed

Our garments of their soundness; winter's blast,

Whirling the snowy scourge from Ida's top,

The very birds destroyed, and froze our limbs.

Fierce was the summer's glare, what time the sea

Its heaving billows hush'd in soft repose,

Slept 'neath the blaze of noon; but why deplore
 These ills?—the pain is past: past to the dead—
 They court not life again: nought it avails
 The living them to mourn, or fortune's turns—
 Henceforth I bid to grief a long adieu.

To us, survivors of the Argive host,
 The final issue much these ills outweighs.
 Our's is the boast, a boast to be proclaim'd
 In the bright face of day, to all who speed
 O'er land or sea, that th' Achaian host,
 Victorious over Troy, with her proud spoils
 Have heaped the altars of the gods of Greece.
 Hail to our city! let us all exclaim—
 Hail to our valorous chiefs! Jove's favouring arm
 This issue has ensured: I now have done.

Ch. That to my mind your words conviction bring
 I'll not deny: old age it well becomes
 Instruction to pursue with youthful zeal:
 The royal house and Clytemnestra most
 This news affects, but I shall share their bliss.

Cl. I shrieked with joy when the nocturnal blaze
 Effulgently proclaimed the fall of Troy.

The scoffer then with taunts exclaimed—" By signs
 Like these delusive thou art then convinced
 Ilion is ours? credulity belongs
 To all thy sex:" though thus condemned, forthwith
 A sacrifice I ordered: at my word
 The altars blazed, soft clouds of incense rose,
 And cries of triumph through the city rung.
 What canst thou further add? the king's own lips
 Ere long shall tell me more; I'll now prepare
 What best may grace my honoured lord's return.
 To a wife's eyes what sight so ravishing
 As a loved consort to her arms restored
 Safe from war's doubtful strife, and to unfold
 His palace gates herself; go, speed his steps;
 His people burn to manifest their love.
 His wife he'll find the guardian of his house,*
 Faithful as when he left her to her vows—
 To him devoted, to his foes a foe;

* The Greek literally rendered would be—" His
 wife he'll find the watch-dog of his house"—a com-
 parison expressive, though harsh, yet not ill suited to
 the venerable simplicity of the heroic age.

No slur upon her honour—rust to brass
Will sooner cleave than I be faithless found.

[*Exit* CLYTEMNESTRA.]

Her. Such lofty language if by truth sustained
Disgraces not a high-born woman's lips.

Ch. In terms distinct and clear she has replied
To all thy queries: herald, now declare
Lives Menelaus still, and shall our eyes
Witness that much-loved hero's safe return?

Her. The tale that flatters but is false, I spurn;
Quickly the truth my friends would undeceive.

Ch. From these ambiguous hints, the truth, I ween,
Accords not with the tenor of our vows.

Her. His fate we know not; from th' Achaian host
He and his vessel both have disappeared.

Ch. A different track pursued the king from Troy,
Or did some tempest's fury thwart his course?

Her. Like the fleet arrow which attains its aim,
Your words have struck direct our common woe.

Ch. What through the fleet does rumour's voice
assert?

Lives he, or must we mourn his tragic end?

Her. The truth He only knows whose radiant orb
Sheds on earth's bosom fructifying beams.

Ch. How rose, how sunk the storm which on the
fleet,

Winged with celestial wrath, destructive fell?

Her. By news ill-omen'd to o'ercloud a day
Sacred to triumph ill would please the gods.*

When at a city with dejected looks
Arrives some routed army's messenger,
Announcing tidings, whose sad tenor wakes
The throb of public sorrow, and o'ershades

* *Ill would please the gods.* The meaning of this passage is, that the honours due to the gods presiding over good and evil events are different. The former call for songs of triumph: to the latter is suited the mournful dirge of the Furies, those dread mysterious beings who were regarded as the instruments of calamities, both public and private. The prevalent feeling, the herald argues, on the present occasion, ought to be joy and exultation at the glorious event of which he was the messenger; any partial disaster which had occurred to the Grecian fleet on the passage home was for the moment to be forgotten. The voice of triumph was not to be marred by the hymn of the Furies.

Each house with mourning for love's severed ties—
 Woes doubly-barbed like these, the fated train
 Of gore-stain'd Mars, th' infernal notes suggest
 Too justly of the Furies' pæan strain ;
 But how shall I, with glorious tidings fraught,
 And coming to a state replete with joy,
 Check its bright triumphs by depicting
 The heaven-commissioned storm which scourged
 the Greeks ?

It fell on us by night—water and flame,
 Opposing elements, exchanged a pledge
 To wreak destruction on the Argive host.
 'Midst brooding darkness swell'd the raging deep,
 Ship against ship by Thracian blasts was hurled.
 Lashed by the whirlwind's fury, and engulfed
 By the wide-gaping surge, their gallant forms
 Were seen no more—the pilot's art was vain.
 The radiant morn beheld th' Ægean sea
 With naval spoils, and with the corpses pale
 Of Grecian warriors strown: some god preserved
 Our vessel and its crew ; no mortal hand
 The rudder could have swayed : above, around,

Destruction raged ; but fortune smiled on us.
The anchor held its grasp ; the winds in vain
Impelled our vessel to the reefy shore.
Escaped a watery grave our lot appeared
Too fortunate for credence ; much we mourned
Th' heroic army's fate, yet solace found
In mutual converse on our sufferings.
If of our comrades any yet survive
Doubtless they deem us perished ; we forebode
The like of them : may heaven these fears dispel.
That Menelaus will return, doubt not ;
If one bright ray of sunshine gild his course,
And Jove has not decreed to end his race,
There still is hope : the truth I now have told.

CHORUS.

I. I.

What power unseen, whose piercing eye
 Sees through the hidden depths of fate,
 'Twixt Helen's name* and destiny
 Such wondrous semblance could create?

* The Greeks superstitiously believed that a mysterious destiny frequently controlled the selection of the names of individuals, so as to render them ominous of their future fortunes.—*Vide Elmsly, ad Eurip. Bacch. 508, et Soph. Aj. 425, and Eurip. Phœniss. 645, as quoted by Bishop Blomfield.* The verification of this doctrine in the case of Helen is illustrated by the etymology of that word, which the poet derives from ἔλω, to destroy; by compounding which with ναῦς, a word somewhat similar in sound to Helen is produced, *elenaus*, signifying destroyer of ships. This is very far-fetched, and is in fact no better than absurd punning; but not satisfied with confining it to one word, he coins in the same way ἑλάνδρος, destroyer of men; ἑλέπολις, destroyer of cities. There is no possibility

War-stirring name ! fleets, armies, states
 Destruction sealed, when, through the latticed gates
 Her light form gliding, swift the zephyrs bore*
 Their beauteous charge the billows o'er.
 Then rung the din of arms ; borne o'er the main,
 Athwart the furrowy track of twinkling oars,
 Like hunters after prey,† a shield-armed train
 Sought silver Simois and his woodland shores :

of translating into English verse this mass of Greek compounds. Superstition as to names could alone have rendered all this tolerable even in Greek. It forms, however, the introduction to an ode which, though obscure in parts, is fraught with striking beauties, both poetical and moral.

* *Swift the zephyrs bore.* The Greek calls it the giant zephyr, an epithet which Casaubon and Schutz refer to the poetical generation of Zephyr from Oceanus and Terra, but G. Wakefield, as quoted by Butler, explains γίγαντος as another word for μέγαλου, ισχυρου. This appears more natural and probable.

† *Like hunters after prey—κυναγοι.* As the hunter diligently tracks the steps of wild animals in the chase, so the Greeks are poetically represented as pursuing the furrowy traces of the vessel of Paris over the waves.

Dire was their object, urged by vengeful flame
For bloody strife, for furious war they came.

I. II.

Burst on Troy the storm of woe ;
Dismay and terror marked its course,
And Jove, of faithless guests the foe,
Winged with new ire its fatal force.
Then cowering sunk the guilty throng
Whose lips profaned the hymeneal song:
No more thy ancient streets, imperial Troy,
Rung with notes of festive joy :
To scorn and bitter hate, by suffering stung,
Paris, revenge on thee her sons besought ;
The fatal marriage dwelt on every tongue,
And the long train of woes thy crimes had
wrought ;
The senseless shepherd thus a lion rears,*
Dear to his house at first, its pest in future years.

* *The senseless shepherd thus a lion rears.* This beautiful allegory has been strangely referred by some critics to Helen ; by Heath for example, and even

I. III.

Gentle while young and bland
 The milky dugs it prest,
 'Twas tossed and fondled like an infant boy;
 By old and young carest,
 It licked th' extended hand,
 Whilst sparkling in its ardent eye flashed joy.
 But soon the rabid rage boils o'er,

Schutz leans to the opinion; but to say nothing of the absurdity of comparing a lovely and delicate female to a savage animal, the context clearly refers it to Paris. The allegory is preceded by an animated contrast between the notes of festal joy with which Troy rung on the first arrival of Paris and Helen, and the execrations heaped upon them by the populace, after an experience of the miseries brought upon Troy by their crime. Paris in particular is thus singled out in the line—

κικλήσκουσα Πάριν τὸν αἰνόλεκτρον, &c.

Then follows the allegory, which forms a striking illustration of the folly of the Trojans in having pampered and cherished a beautiful but perfidious youth to their own destruction.

Rankling in its youthful veins,
 It spurns control, the fostering hand disdains,
 And leaps the fold to slake its thirst in gore.
 Thus Paris traitor proved and false to Troy,
 Nurse of his youth: for to her gates was borne
 By him, that Syren smiling to destroy,
 Love's fairest flower, * resplendent as the morn!
 Ah! fatal day, those hearts so gay
 Dreamt not of sorrow near;
 How changed the scene—with ruthless mien,
 War, vengeance, death appear,
 And pale Erynnys rolls her haggard eyes—
 Jove's minister of wrath for violated ties.

II. I.

Tradition, rich in varied lore
 Culled from the spoils of time, declares
 That pregnant fortune† breeds a store
 Of sorrows and envenomed cares.

* Nothing can be more rich and beautiful than the epithets clustered together in the original to express the loveliness of Helen—but they defy translation.

† A proverbial maxim is here introduced by the

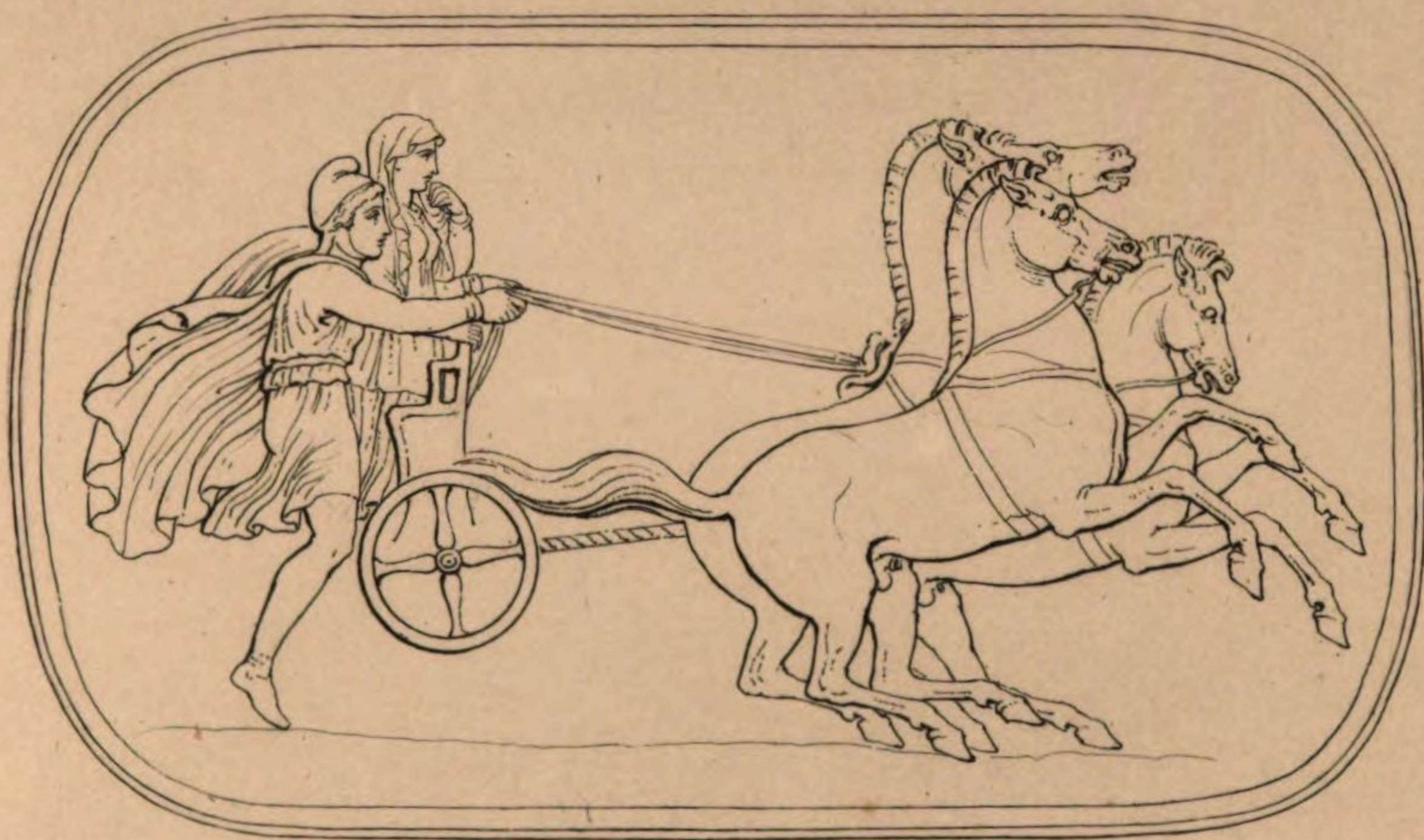
Raveling in its youthful years,
 It spurs control, the dancing hand declines,
 And keeps the field to strike its blows in vain.
 Thus Paris' traitor proved not false to Troy,
 None of his youth: for to her arms was none
 By him, that Syren smiling to destroy.
 Love's fairest flower, * resplendent as the sunset
 Ah! Good day, those hearts so gay,
 Dream not of sorrow now:
 How changed the scene—with ruthless war,
 War, vengeance, death appear,
 And pale Bryanna rolls her haggard eyes—
 Jove's minister of wrath for violated ties.

II. 1.

Tradition, rich in varied lore
 Cull'd from the spoils of time, declares
 That pregnant fortune† breeds a store
 Of sorrows and envenomed cares.

* Nothing can be more rich and beautiful than the epithets clustered together in the original to express the loveliness of Helen—but they defy translation.

† A proverbial maxim is here introduced by the



vide page 204. 1.586

The laughing hours her smiles bestow,
 Prove the sure harbingers of woe.
 Stern sentiment avaunt—tho' impious deeds,
 Fit offspring in its train, Injustice leads,
 Yet such as borne aloft by nobler views
 The votaries of virtue shine confest,
 No fated stroke of wretchedness pursues,
 The progeny of men like these is blest,
 While wrath divine* and angry fates abide
 The man who justice spurns, and towers in guilty
 pride.

poet which admits not of literal translation. There is current (he says) among men a traditionary, ancient saying, that when good fortune has attained her acmè, she becomes pregnant, nor dies childless—he means that she brings forth calamities.

* *While wrath divine, &c.* The corresponding passage in the original, commencing φιλεῖ δὲ τίκτειν ὕβρις, is rendered so obscure by the corruption of the text, that all the commentators, with Wellauer bringing up the rear, have laboured upon it in vain.

II. II.

Nor smoky roofs,* nor scanty stores,
 Nor poverty's low shed,
 Can quench the light which justice pours
 Around the humblest head:
 In her bright train, linked hand in hand,
 Around the kindred virtues take their stand—
 Where'er the traces of their steps are found
 'Tis holy, consecrated ground;

* *Nor smoky roofs, &c.* This connection of justice with abstinence and poverty is finely imagined. Several parallel passages may be cited both from ancient and modern poetry. Thus Horace—

“Mundæque parvo sub lare pauperum
 Cænæ, sine aulæis et ostro,
 Solicitam explicuere frontem.”

So Tasso—

“Non copre abito vil la nobil luce.”

And Milton—

“courtesy,
 Which oft is sooner found in lowly sheds
 With smoky rafters, than in tap'stry halls,
 In courts of princes.”

Vide et Lucretius, lib. ii. 27, et Ariosto, cant. xiv. l. 62.



Flaxman del.

page 207. 17.

But from the gilded roofs, the pompous scene
 In lofty state where blood-stained wretches reign,
 Th' indignant goddess turns with angry mien,
 Nor treats ignoble wealth with less disdain.—
 Pure are her ways, though oft to mortal eye
 Beset they seem with clouds, and wrapped in
 mystery.

*[AGAMEMNON is here supposed to enter in a chariot,
 followed by CASSANDRA.]*

RE. III.

Approach, illustrious king,
 Crowned with the spoils of Troy!
 How shall we hail thee and thy triumphs view?
 How best express our joy?
 How fely touch the string
 Twixt vulgar praise and honour justly due?
 Prompt is perfidy to lour
 Mouth the gay covert of a smile,
 Tongue softly bowing veils the arts of guile,
 Unmasked their baseness in affliction's hour.
 When first in Helen's cause thy voice proclaimed
 Fierce war, and echoed back our vales the cry,



But from the gilded roofs, the pompous scene
In lofty state where blood-stained wretches reign,
Th' indignant goddess turns with angry mien,
Nor treats ignoble wealth with less disdain.—
Pure are her ways, though oft to mortal eye
Beset they seem with clouds, and wrapped in
mystery.

[AGAMEMNON is here supposed to enter in a chariot,
followed by CASSANDRA.]

II. III.

Approach, illustrious king,
Crowned with the spoils of Troy!
How shall we hail thee and thy triumphs view?
How best express our joy?
How fitly touch the string
'Twixt vulgar praise and honour justly due?
Prompt is perfidy to lour
'Neath the gay covert of a smile,
Tears softly flowing veil the arts of guile,
Unmasked their baseness in affliction's hour.
When first in Helen's cause thy voice proclaimed
Fierce war, and echoed back our vales the cry,

Reason condemned that ardour which inflamed
To maddening rage the Greeks too prompt to die.
But justly now, thy regal brow
The wreath of glory wears ;
Much does this land, this state demand
Thy sage, paternal cares —
Soon wilt thou know who firm with hearts unmoved
Their loyalty have kept, and who have factious
proved.

SCENE V.

CHORUS, AGAMEMNON, CASSANDRA.

AGAMEMNON.

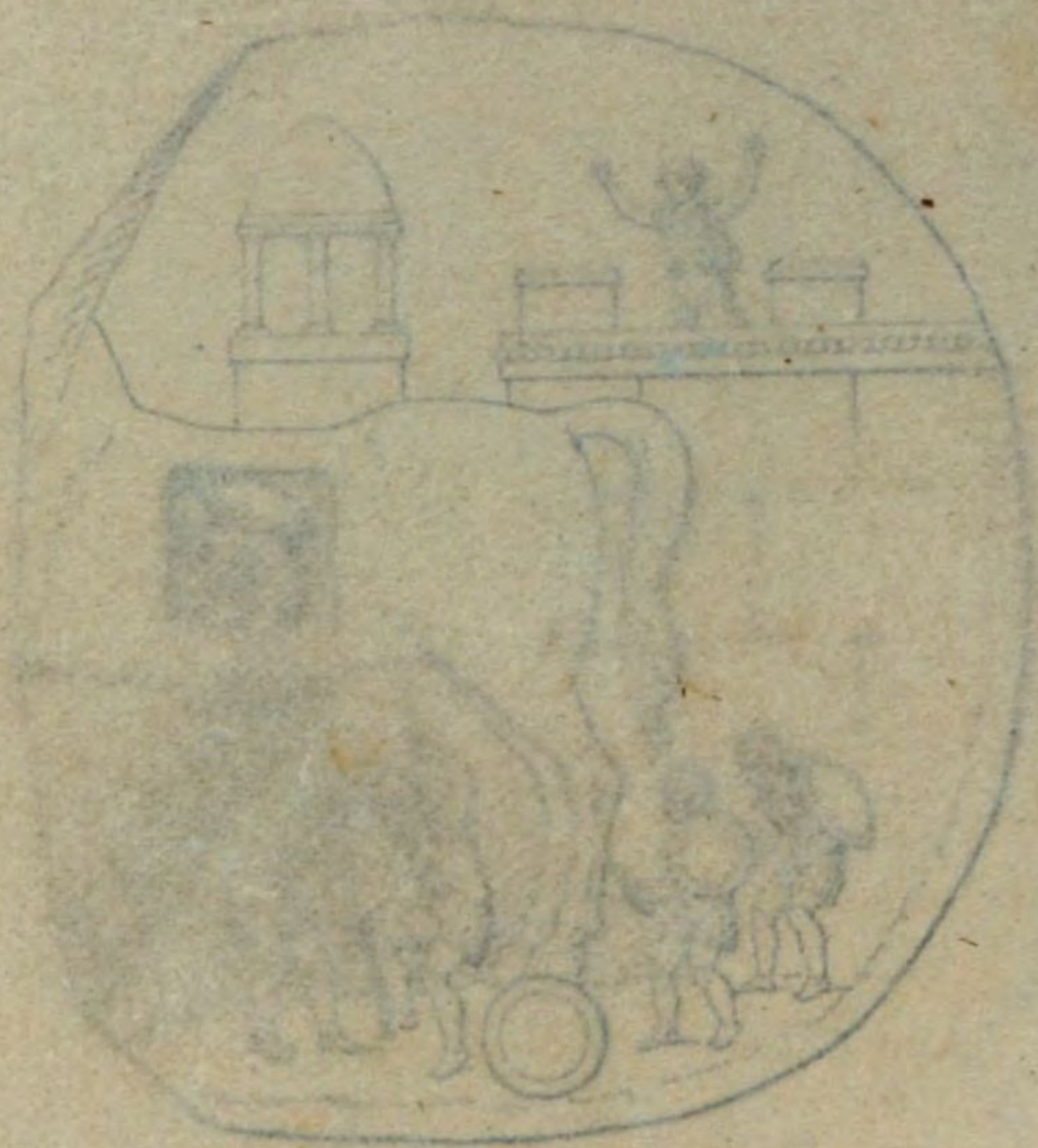
Argos, and you her guardian gods, whose power
Restores me to this land, achieved on Troy
The retribution due, I first salute.
No pleading advocate, but Ilion's guilt,
The powers celestial urged unanimous,
To freight the bloody urn* with the decree
Of vengeance; suppliant Hope in vain

* *To freight the bloody urn.* This passage, which represents the gods as sitting in judgment upon Troy, and unanimously condemning her, is borrowed from the practice of the most ancient courts of justice in Greece. Two urns were placed in the court, into which the suffrages of acquittal or condemnation were cast by the judges, and the fate of the accused depended on a comparison of their contents. — *Vide Archæologia of Potter*, vol. i. p. 107.

Th' opposing urn approached—empty it stood—
 That city's fate the smoking ruins tell:
 Still howls the blast of evil—gorgeous spoils
 Feed the fierce flames and wing them with perfumes.
 Rise then our thanks to heaven: success has crown'd
 The snare stupendous, which the Argive horse*
 Bore in his entrails through the streets of Troy.
 Emitting from his sides a shield-armed train,
 Her walls, what time the Pleiades declined,
 With lion-rage they scaled, and slaked their thirst
 In tyrants' gore;—due tribute to the gods
 Thus paid—thy train of thought I'll now pursue.
 Rare are those mortals who a friend arrayed

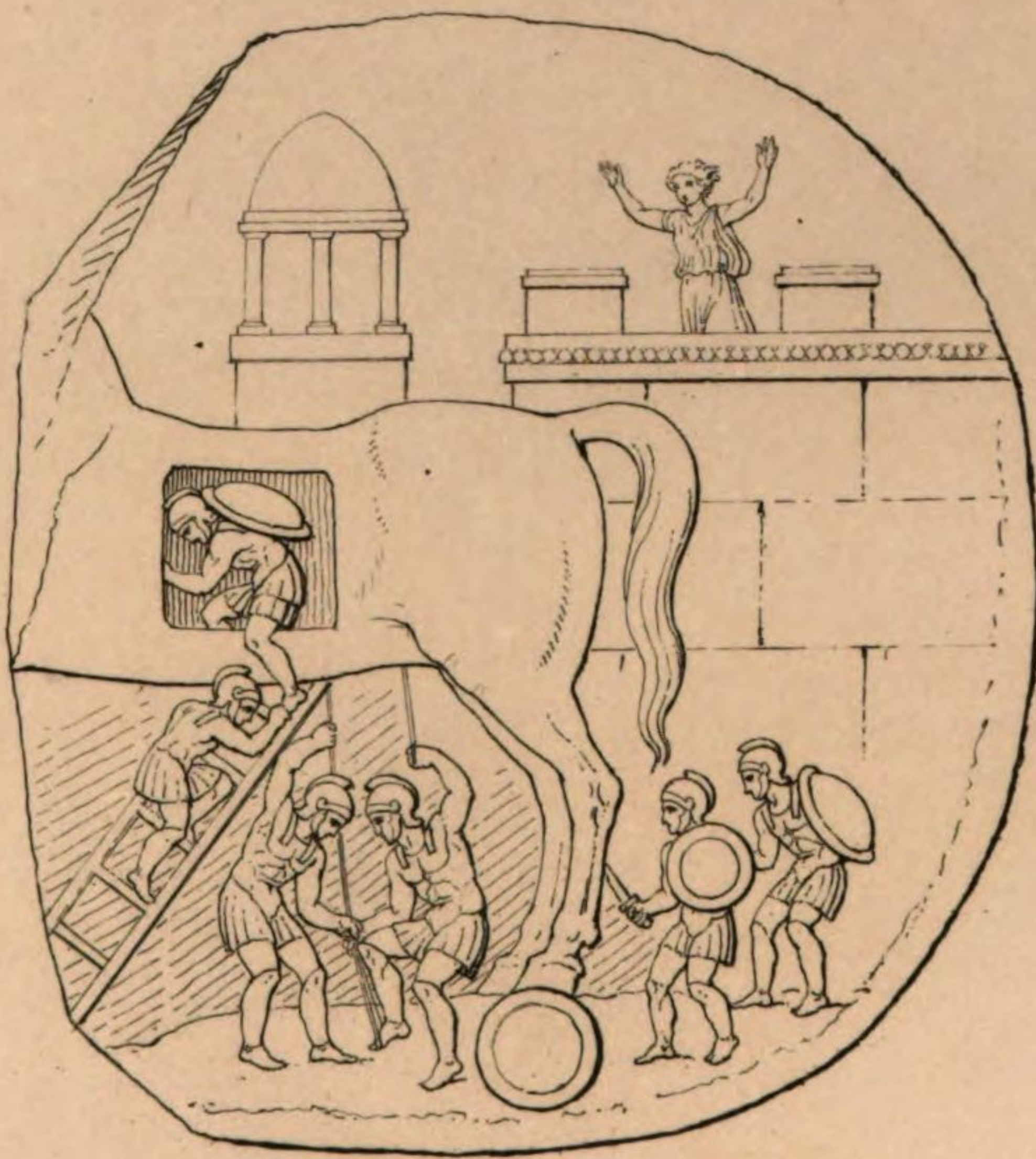
* *The snare stupendous, &c.* In this passage there is a confusion of metaphors in the original. The Trojan horse is called the “snare stupendous,” “the Argive monster,” “the foal of the horse,” “the ravenous lion leaping the walls;” and all this in the same breath. The image of the lion *leaping* over the walls of the city, ὑπερθορῶν δὲ πύργον ὤμησης λέων, appears to have been in Virgil's mind.—*Æn.* vi.

“Quum fatalis equus *saltu* super ardua venit
 Pergama, et armatum peditem gravis adtulit alvo.”





page 210. U. 5.



In fortune's smiles with eyes unenvying view :
 That baleful poison rankling at the heart
 A double smart inflicts; the sufferer mourns
 His own peculiar woes—then, at the sight
 Of others more successful, sighs again.
 I know mankind full well, nor need to learn
 That empty as the shadow of a shade
 Are many who with smiles my presence hail.
 Ulysses only who reluctant sailed,*
 When once embarked, faithful and constant proved;
 Living or dying be his worth proclaimed.
 On all relating to the city's weal,
 Or to the gods, (due games being first ordained
 In full convention,) we'll deliberate.
 Whate'er is sound, unaltered shall remain;
 Where remedies are needful, caustic power
 Shall search the peccant part, or, if that fail,
 Excision wisely used the wound may cure.

* *Ulysses*. The classical reader will recollect that this allusion to Ulysses glances at the story of his having feigned madness to avoid being obliged to join the armament against Troy.

Now shall the palace and its friendly hearths
 Witness our grateful praises to the gods:
 They to a term my distant toils have brought—
 May lasting triumphs on my steps attend.

CLYTEMNESTRA *enters.*

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Senate of Argos, citizens, give ear,
 I blush not in your presence to declare
 That in this heart my consort reigns supreme ;—
 Time banishes reserve : no other tongue
 Could paint my woes while the king warred at Troy.
 Hard is her fate who solitary mourns
 An absent husband—rumour's forgeries
 In ever-shifting forms her peace assail.
 Tale follows tale ; each fresh report augments
 The terrors of the former : had the king
 Endured the many wounds by fame announced,
 His body, like the surface of a net,
 Pierced through and through had been ; if he had
 died

Oft as report has killed him, Geryon self,*
 The triple-bodied monster, who endured
 In that portentous form, the stroke of death
 Repeated thrice, had yielded him the palm.
 Despair ensued, and but for friendly hands
 Which more than once the fatal cord unloosed,
 It had foreclosed my woes: these facts explain
 The absence of Orestes—much-loved pledge
 Of the pure faith we to each other vowed.
 Stropheus, thy friend in arms, with tender care
 Nurtures the youth;—my dangers, shouldst thou fall
 'Neath Ilion's walls, or should the state be 'whelmed
 In fearful anarchy, he oft pourtrayed:
 Prone is mankind to trample on the fallen:
 His warnings were not coloured by deceit.
 So fast my tears have flowed, that finally
 Their fountain ceased, and I could weep no more.

* *Geryon self, &c.* Geryon was a monster whom
 the poets fabled to have had three heads and as many
 bodies. Hercules was sent by Eurystheus to Gades to
 slay him.

The faded lustre in these eyes attests
 Their long-drawn vigils, whilst my tears deplored
 The disregarded torches;*—if perchance
 I snatched a moment's sleep, the gnats' shrill hum
 Sufficed to break the charm—from cruel dreams
 I woke, to muse on worse realities.
 But this blest day shall banish thoughts of grief:
 The king to me is as the faithful dog†

* *The disregarded torches.* She means to say that often she could not sleep for fear lest the promised signal of the beacon, or torch, announcing the fall of Troy, might, through the neglect of the sentinels at some of the stations, be unobserved, and therefore fail of due transmission.

† There is an instance in Burns of a somewhat similar accumulation of images to illustrate the fugitive nature of earthly pleasures.—

“ But pleasures are like poppies spread,
 You seize the flower, its bloom is shed;
 Or like the snow falls in the river—
 A moment white, then melts for ever;
 Or like the Borealis race
 That flit ere you can point their place;
 Or like the rainbow's lovely form
 Evanishing amidst the storm.”

Ode on Vicissitude.

To the safe flock, or to the heaving ship
 The anchor's grasp;—to the resplendent fane
 The lofty shaft, or to a father's heart
 His only son;—as the first glimpse of land
 To sailors tempest-tost—the sun's bright beams
 Chasing a tempest's gloom;—or to the heart
 Of weary traveller by toil opprest,
 The sight ecstatic of refreshing streams.
 Oh! blest immunity from threatened woe!
 Envy, begone—too well we grief have known.
 Most loved of mortals, from this car descend,
 But sully not in dust, great king, thy feet
 Which scarce have rested from the glorious work
 Of trampling down proud Troy: ye thoughtless
 slaves,
 Why this delay? forget ye my commands,
 With trappings to spread o'er your monarch's way?
 Be his whole path empurpled: Justice guides,
 Herself, his steps to bliss transcending hope.
 Our watchful care, and the propitious powers
 That rule above, the rest shall regulate.

Ag. Daughter of Leda, guardian of my house,
 In length, thy speech might with my absence vie.
 From other lips than thine such high-wrought
 praise,
 If merited at all, had better flowed.
 Treat me not like a woman, bend not low
 In flattery's pompous modes,* nor wound me thus
 By words fit only for barbaric ears.
 Let no rich trappings proudly deck my way;
 Reserve such honours for the gods; frail man
 Should tremble for himself when he delights
 With stately mien to tread o'er gorgeous robes.
 Honour me as a mortal, not a god:
 My fame needs not these costly ornaments:
 No brighter gifts the gods to mortals grant
 Than a sound judgment; when a man has closed
 A prosperous course in peace, pronounce him blest.
 This be my aim, and I shall fearless prove.

* *In flattery's modes.* Shakspeare expressively says
 in Hamlet—

“No, let the candied tongue lick absurd pomp.”

Cl. Ah! do not thus my wishes contravene.

Ag. In vain thy wishes seek to change my will.

Cl. Fear might have made thee vow what I implore.

Ag. If ever purpose was resolved, 'tis mine.

Cl. Would Priam in thy place have thus resolved?

Ag. He o'er these trappings would have gladly strode.

Cl. Why thus the busy tongue of censure heed?

Ag. The public voice has wondrous potency.

Cl. The unenvied man is ne'er a happy man.

Ag. It ill becomes thy sex to argue thus.

Cl. It well becomes the fortunate to yield.

Ag. Art thou resolved to conquer in this strife?

Cl. Refuse me not, but graciously incline.

Ag. If thus it must be, let some slave unloose

These sandals, for with envious glance some god

May blast me should I walk with covered feet.

I blush to sully thus, such precious robes,

Objects so costly—with benignant mien

Give welcome to this stranger, Jove regards

With favour those who exercise mild sway.

Unwillingly we yield the neck to bonds.

She amid countless spoils the fairest flower,

The conquering army's gift, attends my steps :

By this empurpled way we enter now,

Obedient to thy wish, our royal walls.

Cl. Does not the sea beneath its boundless waves

Nourish, profuse, the matter of these dies,

These purple costly hues ? thy house, oh king,

Can boast an ample store—ah ! with what joy

Would I have yielded to be trodden thus,

All that refulgent heap, if at this price

The oracles had fixed thy safe return.

The root survives, and upwards it shall push

Luxuriant branches, whose embowering shade

Shall shield us from the dog-star's scorching beams.

To the paternal mansion thy return

Is sweet as warmth amid the winter's cold :

Or when, 'neath summer's heat, th' unripe grape

Swells for the vintage, thy loved presence here

Would shed a grateful coolness. Mighty Jove,

Give ear, and let thy power the future guide.

[*Exit* AGAMEMNON.]

CHORUS.

STROPHE.

Why do foreboding terrors haunt*

This sad, this tortured bosom still?

Why does some voice mysterious chaunt

Sad presages of ill.

In vain I call my thoughts away,

These visitants unbidden stay;

* The poet, from the beginning of the tragedy, gradually prepared the mind for its terrible consummation. The watchman obscurely hints at the guilt of Clytemnestra in the opening speech; many of the remarks of the chorus are uttered under the influence of a mysterious and undefinable dread of impending calamities: but now that the catastrophe approaches, they touch, in the strain of their forebodings, the confines of prediction. The dull and almost indistinct dirge of the Furies is supposed to be heard along the walls of the palace, and to thrill the hearts of the auditors. The beauties of this chorus in the original are striking, but from its enigmatical and prophetic character, it is in parts peculiarly obscure. The translator is forced to be paraphrastic or unintelligible.

Ah! would to heaven they'd take their flight,
 Like dreams dispelled by morning light,
 Then would my heart its wonted peace regain :
 Long on the sandy borders of the main
 The cables held our wind-bound fleet,
 Which cast impatient looks towards Ilion's shore ;
 That fleet I now returning greet—
 Its triumphs sealed, its martial labours o'er.
 And yet of hope bereft my thoughts inspire
 Nought but the Fury's dirge, unsuited to the lyre.

ANTISTROPHE.

Ye viewless forms, that hover near,
 And rack my mind with torturing pain,
 Ah! were your pictured scenes but empty fear,
 Mere phantoms of the brain!
 Too well I feel—too surely know
 Ye come the harbingers of woe ;
 Yet, though despairing, to the skies
 My prayers, my vows shall suppliant rise,
 Striving against th' unalterable spell ;
 Nigh blooming health disease and sorrow dwell ;

Perfidious shoals, the pinnace gay
 Arrest full oft, as light it skims the wave—
 Part of the freight then prudence casts away,
 The remnant from th' engulfing surge to save.
 And thus my griefs I fain would woo to rest,
 While whispering low the cares that deep corrode
 my breast.

EPODE.

When plenteous harvests sent by favouring Jove
 The furrows gild, or paint with fruits the grove,
 Forgotten are the scenes of want and pain
 Which closely press in pining famine's train.
 But what enchantment* can to life restore
 The man whose vital blood once stains the floor.

* *But what enchantment, &c.* This sentiment closely accords with that fine passage in *Othello*, in which, adverting to his taper, he says—

“ If I quench thee, thou flaming minister,
 I can again thy former life restore,
 Should I repent—but once put out thy light,
 Thou cunning'st pattern of excellent nature,
 I know not where is that Promethean heat
 That can thy light relumine.”—Act V.

On the great master of that potent spell*
The burning wrath of Jove indignant fell.
Long since my heart, my tongue, their words had
found,
The struggling effort did not fate confound.
But now in moody grief I pine away,
For fate relentless frowns, and marks its destined
prey.

SCENE VI.

CHORUS, CLYTEMNESTRA, CASSANDRA.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Thou too, Cassandra, enter, since a place
Jove has assigned thee 'mid th' attendant train
Of vestal slaves who tend the Ctesian shrine.
Quit that proud car, those haughty looks discard.

* Æsculapius is here alluded to, who, it is fabled, was slain by Jupiter with a thunderbolt for reanimating a dead corpse.

The mighty offspring of Alcmene* once,
 Fame says, submitted to the servile yoke.
 Happy for thee thy lot is cast 'midst those
 Who from long ancestry their wealth derive.†
 They who by sudden strides to greatness rise,
 Oft rule with iron sway: but we pursue
 Established custom as our rule of life.

Ch. Plain is her language: tangled as thou art
 In fate's portentous toils, submit thy will—
 If haply due submission it can brook.

Cl. I cannot fail her reason to persuade,
 Except she speak a language barbarous,

* Hercules, by an injunction of the oracle of Apollo, was sold as a slave to Omphale, Queen of Lydia, in expiation of the murder of Iphitus, whom he slew in a moment of furious passion.—*Vide Schutz.*

† The milder use of power by those who exercise it as a consequence of hereditary wealth and dignity, than by the newly rich or great, is a fact, verified by general experience, and must often have forced itself on the observation of so acute an observer of mankind as Æschylus, amidst the struggles of parties in a democratic state like Athens. This sentiment is repeated by him in a very similar form in the Prometheus,

"Ἄπας δὲ τραχὺς ὅστις ἄν νέον κρατῇ.—*Prom.* 35.

Like the harsh jargon of the swallow's throat.*

Ch. Follow the queen ; wisdom this part enjoins ;
Yield to persuasion's voice and quit the car.

Cl. To linger still about the door, the hour
Forbids ; the victims ranged for sacrifice
Demand our presence in the central court.

My bliss transcends all hope —stranger relent ;
If to thy ear an unknown tongue I speak
Mark it at least by some barbaric sign.

Ch. Wild as an untamed animal, she needs
The faithful aid of some interpreter.

Cl. Her mind is frenzied, reason's light is flown :

* The Greeks were in the habit of calling all persons *swallows* who did not speak their language with perfect purity. So in the "Frogs" of Aristophanes, Hercules asks—

“ Say, are there not besides an endless tribe
Of beardless dramatists, who prate so fast
They beat Euripides by many a mile.”

To which Bacchus replies—

“ Aye, those young sprigs, that chattering nest of
swallows,
Corrupters of true taste.”

Vide Frogs, Dunster's Translation.

Captive, she mourns her fallen country's woes—
Like a reluctant colt which champs the bit
Till it is all suffused with bloody foam.
Further intreaties are beneath our state.

[CLYTEMNESTRA goes out.]

Ch. Unfortunate, I pity thee, and cannot chide:
Why linger in that car? descend and bow
Thy neck, submissive to the yoke of fate.

Ca. Ye gods! oh earth! Apollo! oh Apollo!

Ch. With piteous plaints why thus address the
power

Whom 'tis forbidden to invoke with tears?

Ca. Ye gods! oh earth! Apollo! oh Apollo!

Ch. With words ill-omened she again invokes
The god who ne'er responds to strains of grief.

Ca. Apollo! oh Apollo! God of the ways,*
Wilt thou a second time destroy my peace?

* *God of the ways.* The Greek word is 'Αγνιεύ, *i. e.* presiding over the ways, an epithet of Apollo, to whom it was customary to erect altars by the public roads or streets at Athens. Aristophanes, in the "Wasps," applies the epithet in a similar way.

Ch. Hark! she will sing prophetic her own woes.
The mind divine still triumphs 'midst these bonds.

Ca. Apollo! oh Apollo! what abode,
What mansion this to which my feet are led?

Ch. Ask'st thou what mansion? 'tis the royal house
Of th' Atridæ—what I speak is truth.

Ca. A house the gods detest: its very walls
The fearful tale could tell of bloody deeds,
Of slaughtered kindred—of th' assassin's snares,
And the ground moistened with a husband's gore.

Ch. Like a sagacious hound this stranger tracks
The murderous horrors of this guilty house.

Ca. Ye weeping slaughtered infants!* of whose
flesh,

* *Ye weeping slaughtered infants.* The children of Thyestes, the brother of Atreus, are here alluded to, all of whom, excepting Ægisthus, who escaped, were murdered by Atreus, and parts of their flesh served up at a banquet, of which their father, ignorant of what had happened, partook. It is fabled by the ancient mythologists that the sun, in horror of the atrocious deed, averted his beamy head from the spectacle. The phantoms of these children are seen by Cassandra in her prophetic visions.—*Vide Preliminary Dissertation*, p. 136.

At table served, your reckless sire partook,
Your's is indeed a thrilling evidence.

Ch. The fame of thy prophetic powers long since
Has reached our ears—but prophecies avaunt.

Ca. Ye gods, what's now impending? what new
woes,

What dreadful project frames that mind? no cure,
No pardon for it—evil beyond redress!

Ch. These prophecies I fathom not, but those
Refer to facts with which all Argos rings.

Ca. And dar'st thou, wretch accursed, while at the
bath

Attending on thy lord? how shall my tongue
The deed proclaim—the fatal hour draws nigh;
Redoubling from her hand the death-strokes fall.

Ch. I understand thee not; thy oracles
Are shrouded in enigmas dark as night.

Ca. Ye gods, what now! is it the net of hell?
That snare the consort of his bosom wrought:
Ye furies, of this house insatiate foes,
Howl forth your baleful song of horrid joy.

Ch. What furies urgest thou with hideous shrieks

To rend these walls? thy words are terrible;
 The ruddy drop is curdling at my heart,
 As when the fatal spear quenches life's ray:
 Evil is nigh at hand.—

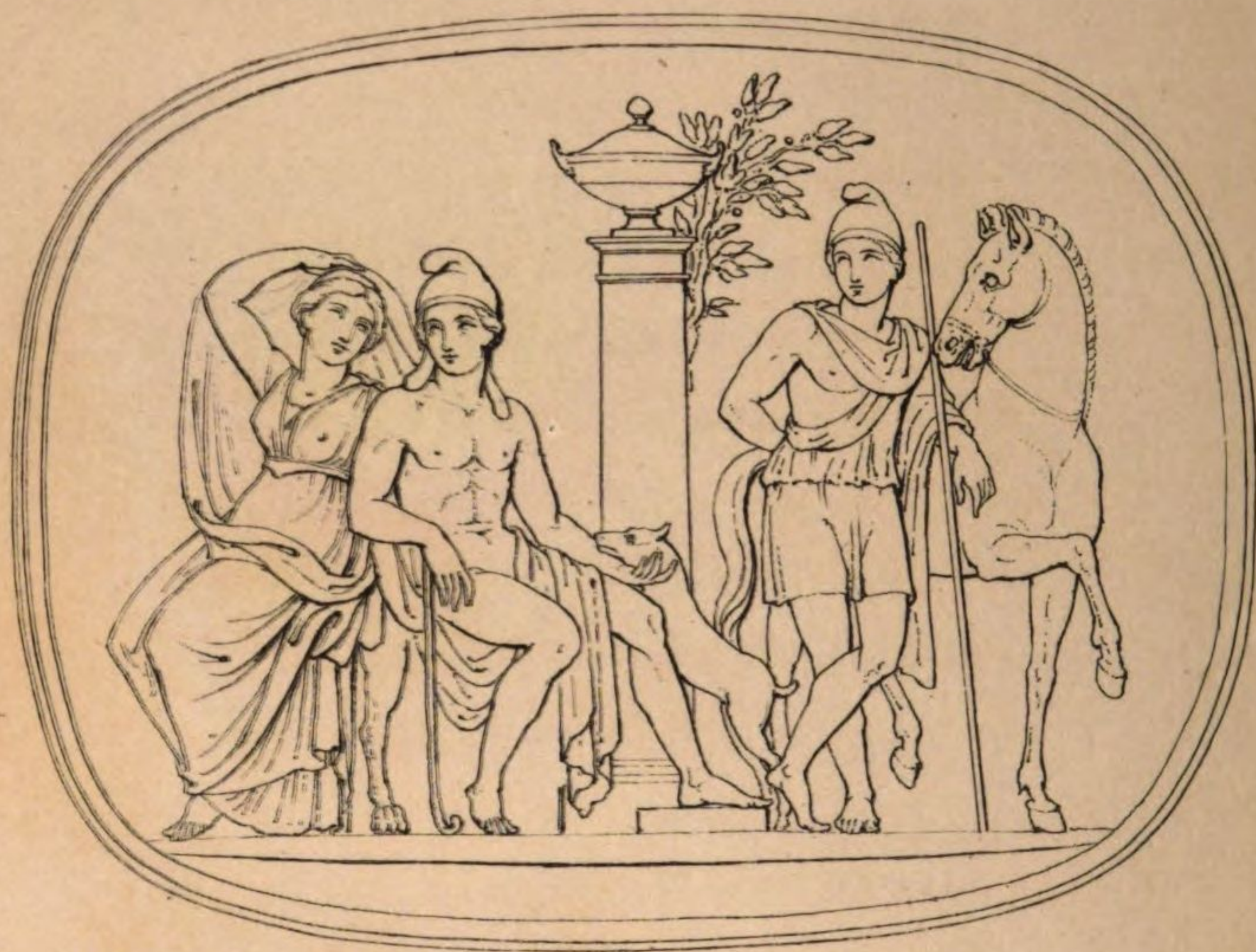
Ca. Behold! behold!

Oh! free the noble bull from the thick toils
 Which with such matchless art about his limbs
 The hateful heifer twines: she strikes—he falls!
 And in the bath, his destined tomb, expires.

Ch. I cannot boast the power to penetrate
 Thy oracles; but from these shadowy hints
 I augur woe: has ever aught of good
 From the divining power to man accrued?
 Its deep ambiguous terms the truth invest
 With mysteries which thrill my inmost soul.

Ca. Alas! my sad, my pitiable fate!
 My own woes blend with those I thus deplore.
 Wherefore me wretched did you hither lead
 But to be partner of his bloody doom?

Ch. Thy rapt, inspired mind distracted raves,
 Wild are thy strains, unfit for utterance;
 Thus in soft plaintive thrills the bird of eve,



Nuptials of Paris fatal to my friends

With never-ceasing song, thy life-long
And measure the narrow course of life's short path.
Ca. Alas! alas! what agony I feel
My late remembered dream, the soaring wings
With which the gods thy little form have clothed
Bear thee through liquid fields of air; thy life
Is one unclouded day of gentle peace.

But now the new-born world will surely cheer
Ch. These words, alas! have piercing grief,
Whence flow they? Inspiration and a will
Thy language is yet fraught with energy
Who to thy prescient eye the path unfold
Of future evil and impending woe?

Ca. Nuptials of Paris! fatal to my friends!
Scamander! whose loved stream waters those plains
In which my infant feet, unknown to woe,
Disparted once, adieu! ere long thy banks,
Cecilia, and the stream of Scherou,
Shall listen to my melancholy songs.

Ch. Now dark no more thy words, the simple of sense
Might know their import, bitter grief pervades
My inmost heart while listening to thy words.



Sketch of a group of people

1840

With never-ceasing song, Itys invokes,
And mourns the sorrows strown in life's drear path.

Ca. Alas ! alas ! sweet nightingale, I would
My fate resembled thine ; the soaring wings
With which the gods thy little form have clothed
Bear thee through liquid fields of air ; thy life
Is one unclouded day of gentle peace.

But me the two-edged steel will fiercely cleave.

Ch. These terrors vain, these unavailing griefs,
Whence flow they ? inarticulate and wild
Thy language is, yet fraught with energy.
Who to thy prescient eye the path unfolds
Of future evil and impending woe ?

Ca. Nuptials of Paris ! fatal to my friends !
Scamander ! whose loved stream waters those plains
In which my infant feet, unknown to woe,
Disported once, adieu ! ere long thy banks,
Cocȳtus, and the stream of Acheron,
Shall listen to my melancholy dirge.

Ch. Now dark no more thy words ; the simplest child
Might know their import ; bitter grief pervades
My inmost heart while listening to thy strains.

Ca. Ah ! cruel memory of that mournful day
Which sealed my country's ruin ! sacred shrines,
On which beneath great Ilion's walls my sire
The choicest bullocks vainly sacrificed !
Our fate his pious cares could not avert,
Soon will this floor be moistened with my blood.

Ch. Again the selfsame strains ? some adverse power
Compels these wailings : what shall be their end ?

Ca. My oracles no more shall imitate,
By mystic terms, the blushing bride* who veils
Her radiant charms ; but in the face of day,
Distinct as when old ocean rears his head,
Shall signify the truth, and tell of deeds
More terrible than aught I've yet pourtrayed.
Begone enigmas : who shall now deny
My words the evils of the past have traced ?
A dismal choir for ever haunts these walls,
Accordant, not harmonious—harsh their strain :

* *The blushing bride.* It was the custom in Greece for a bride to wear a veil for the first three days after the celebration of marriage.





The sister Furies, drunk with human blood,
Here keep their orgies, nor can be expelled.
Fixt to this spot they sing the primal crime,
Then change the strain, and curse the man who
dared

His brother's bed invade: err I, or touch the mark?
Call me false prophetess—impostor: no,
You cannot; rather swear I know full well
The ancient horrors of this royal house.

Ch. What would the sanctity of oaths avail
Our sorrows to assuage; but whence thy power,
Reared as thou wast beyond the ambient main,
To speak of things occurring 'neath these walls
As if to all that passed thou'dst privy been?

Ca. It is Apollo's gift—the power is his.

Ch. Did love impel him, though of race divine?

Ca. I could not bring my lips this fact to state.

Ch. And didst thou on his passion favouring smile?

Ca. I seemed to do so, but deceived the god.

Ch. After the prescient power he had bestowed?

Ca. Yes: from my lips its doom the state had heard.

Ch. And did no vengeance from the god assail thee?

Ca. My oracles through him were fables deemed.

Ch. To us they seem with prescient truth instinct.

Ca. Oh! ye distracting woes! again my brain,
With the prophetic heat inflamed, whirls round:

How ominous the prelude—see you, yon babes,
Shadowy as spectres, peopling nightly dreams!

Those children, massacred by seeming friends,

Who their own mangled flesh display to view,

Their entrails and their hearts, meats horrible,

Which their own father tasted; for these wrongs

Craving revenge, a lion spiritless

Concealed within my master's chamber prowls.

My master did I say, ah! cruel words,

Sad comment on these bonds—thou dreamest not,

Leader of mighty fleets, Troy's vanquisher,

What deadly venom lurks beneath the tongue

Of her, who recently thy ear addressed

In words so smooth and fair—a pestilence

That walks in darkness—woman art thou called?

And murderer of thy husband! other names

Befit thee—snaky monster! Scylla dire!

Howling amidst the depths of ocean's caves,

The sailor's dread—mother of darkest hell—
Cursing thy very friends—detested voice—
E'en now it shrieked as in the battle's rout,
And hailed the king's return with unfelt joy.
You disbelieve—it matters not—ere long
The deed itself will speak, and you shall find
How true the prophetess that spoke in me.

Ch. I shuddered while she spoke: her words de-
scribed

The banquet of Thyestes—icy fear,
So vividly she sketched it, chilled my blood.
Her drift beyond that point I cannot trace.

Ca. Ere long you'll witness Agamemnon's death.

Ch. Infatuate woman, check those dreadful words.

Ca. All help is vain : it must—it must be so.

Ch. Not if the fates are fixed, but heaven forbid.

Ca. E'en while you speak the stroke of death
impends.

Ch. What man can meditate so foul a deed?

Ca. Can you thus blindly solve my oracles?

Ch. The author of the plot thou didst not name.

Ca. Your native tongue you surely comprehend?

Ch. Thou'rt all prophetic, therefore all obscure.

Ca. Oh heavens! this fire consumes me—it prevails.

Apollo!* cruel deity! what horrors!

This human lioness, while far away

Her noble mate, has wallowed in the arms

Of a vile wolf: my murder now she plots.

The poisoned chalice mingled in her wrath

A portion holds for me, and while the steel

For her lord's breast she whets, proclaims the deed

Fit meed for him who brought me to these shores.

Why should I longer on my head endure

These garlands, or support this sceptre? signs

Of power prophetic, the sad source to me

Of nought but deep derision: ere I fall

These hands shall cast them to the earth—begone,

Go deck out some new victim of despair.†

* The original word is *Λυκεῖε*, which literally rendered signifies wolf-destroyer; but Hesychius, as quoted by Bishop Blomfield, explains its meaning metaphorically as cruel or savage.

† The tragedies of Seneca can very rarely be quoted with approbation as compared with those of the Gre-

Apollo comes himself to disengage
 My robe of prescient power: these ornaments
 Have but derision brought from friend and foe.
 Harsh names they called me, mad impostor, fool,
 Poor wandering mendicant: all this I bore.
 At length the prophet-god his prophetess
 Conducts, relentless, to this cruel end.
 Not the paternal shrine, but fatal block,
 Will seal my hapless doom; yet heaven decrees
 I fall not unrevenged: her offspring comes—
 An exile now he roams in distant lands.
 In retribution of his father's fate
 He'll shed his mother's blood: that act will raise
 To their due height the evils of this race.*
 A slaughtered father's corpse the gods have sworn

cian school, of which they are wretched imitations;
 but there is a passage in the *Agamemnon*, referred to
 by Schutz, in which the inspired action and mien of
 Cassandra are painted with so much force as justly to
 merit admiration.—*Vide Sen. Agam. v. 700, seqq.*

* Literally, he will fix the top, or coping-stone, to
 the evils of his kindred.

Shall home recall him:—but why touch I thus
 On other's woes? *I* who so lately viewed
 Troy's dread catastrophe; since now the gods
 The destined lot of its proud victors seal.
 No choice is left me: I will greatly die.
 Portals of Hades, I invoke your gloom!
 All that I shrink from is a lingering death.—
 One mortal stroke, one unconvulsive pang,
 Ope wide the sluices of my blood, and close
 In mild benignant peace these wearied eyes.
Ch. Most wretched, most illumined of thy sex,
 In long detail what evils hast thou sketched.
 But if thus clearly thy foreboding mind
 Impending fate discerns, why to the shrine
 Where death awaits thee, fearlessly approach
 Like an unconscious victim.

Ca. To avoid
 My fate is hopeless. Time speeds on the hour.

Ch. But to spin out the thread of life is sweet.

Ca. The day is come: nought can be gained by
 flight.

Ch. Thy too-unbending courage cancels hope.

Ca. Of woes like these nought dream the fortunate.

Ch. To die thus bravely is a glorious lot.

Ca. Oh sire rever'd! and you heroic brothers!

Ch. What agitates thee now?

Ca. Alas! alas!

Ch. Why these deep sighs? this mental horror
whence?

Ca. The scent of human gore pollutes these walls.

Ch. You smell the victims burning on our shrines.

Ca. No, 'tis a vapour as from gaping tombs.

Ch. Assyrian odours breathe not in your words.

Ca. Mourning my own and Agamemnon's fate:

These walls I enter: strangers, testify

I draw not back like birds that shun the snare:

To this bear witness ye, when, to requite

My death, a woman dies, and when shall fall

For man in wedlock curst, a man: I ask

This last, this parting favour ere I die.

Ch. Ah hapless fair! thy piteous fate we mourn.

Ca. One accent more, one last complaint allow.

Thee I invoke, oh sun! to whose bright beams

Death soon will quench these orbs—you too, whose
hands

Shall visit on my murderers' heads this deed.
 Easy their triumph o'er a helpless slave.
 Oh! wretched state of mortals! ev'n the cloud,
 As it light passes, can to earth bear down
 The fabrics of bright fortunes—sorrow comes,
 And then oblivion comes, and wipes away
 The images of joy that smiled before.
 And this, this sad reverse I most lament.

CHORUS.

Should fortune empty her bright mine,
 Still would insatiate man repine;
 Ne'er do her favoured votaries say
 Her smiles on them too brightly play:
 Those who enjoy that golden smile
 Soft flattery's witching tones beguile;
 To them the glittering valves unfold,
 Their steps obsequious eyes behold,
 Nor in harsh sounds salute their ear
 These accents—*There's no entrance here.*
 Thus to this man th' immortal powers
 Have given to scale old Priam's towers—

Wafted with glory o'er the main
See him his native seat regain.
If he, thus honoured, must atone
For deeds of slaughter not his own,
Condemned for blood by others shed
Himself to mingle with the dead,
Who that this web mysterious shall explore
Will not of heav'n a humble lot implore?

SCENE VII.

The speakers in the following scene are the various individuals composing the Chorus, who, hearing the dying cry of Agamemnon, are agitated by cruel doubts as to the part it becomes them to act.

AGAMEMNON *from behind the scene exclaims*

Oh heavens! a mortal stroke has pierced my breast.

Ch. Hush! heard ye not some wounded person cry?

Ag. Ah me! beneath a second wound I bleed.

Ch. That cry was like the king's: the deed is done.

For our maturest thoughts this crisis calls.

Ch. Scorning half measures, let us boldly raise
A general shout and rouse the citizens.

Ch. Rather with one accord rush in and mark
By the still smoking steel the bloody deed.

Ch. Yes, be it so: this hour to firm resolve
Should nerve the breast, delay must fatal prove.

Ch. Their aim is clear: a future tyrant's rod
Our city in this action may discern.

Ch. We pause, whilst *they*, scanning with eager hope
The path of future glory, spurn delay.

Ch. I'm all perplexed with doubt what part to
take ;

They who propose the act should find the means.

Ch. That sentiment is just ; high-sounding words
Can ne'er re-animate the breathless clay.

Ch. Shall we, through love of life, ignobly bow
Before the vile polluters of this house ?

Ch. It must not be : to die were better far—
Death is a milder scourge than tyranny.*

Ch. Can we with reason from these groans infer
That death already seals our monarch's eyes ?
Such confidence more lucid proof demands :
Wide is the space 'twixt knowledge and conjecture.

Ch. Just is this caution : let us then take means
To ascertain the great Atrides' fate.

* *Death is a milder scourge, &c.* The irresolution and wavering of old age is expressively depicted in the dialogue of the old men who compose the chorus, yet it is pervaded by the high spirit of freeborn Greeks. Butler, however, has justly observed, that their delay to enter within was a necessary consequence of that rule of Grecian tragedy which forbids the chorus to quit the orchestra throughout the performance.—*Vide Preliminary Dissertation*, p. 60.

SCENE VIII.

CLYTEMNESTRA, *and the persons composing the*
CHORUS.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

My former words were for the occasion framed;
But other words I now will boldly speak.
Who that with artful policy has spread
The net of evil for a hated foe,
Will fail to guard against his leaping o'er
The thick-laid toils? this deed was long revolved,
'Twas planned of old—and such consummate skill
(I scruple not to boast) devised the scheme,
That by no art could he avert or fly
His doom; the snare's interminable folds
With fatal splendour so enwrapped his limbs,
That, like a shoal of fish by nets involved,
To seek escape was vain. I stabbed him twice,
And twice he groaned, and then his strength gave
way.

Just as he fell I added a third blow.
 To Hades guardian of the infernal shades,
 An offering due, forth rushed his haughty soul :
 With bloody dew the wound suffused my vest,
 Grateful to me as to the thirsty earth
 Soft genial rain that opes the budding flowers.
 Ancients of Argos, you have heard the truth :
 Think what you will, I glory in the deed.
 And were it for libations now a time,
 My hand ere now had poured them o'er the dead.
 Most just it is that he who mixed the cup
 For such perfidious deeds should drain it dry.*
Ch. We stand aghast at thy audacious words,
 And at these insults heaped on such a man.
Cl. You treat me as a woman without soul,
 But I confront your clamours dauntlessly,
 And equally condemn your praise or blame.

* This is one, among others already noticed, of the bold orientalisms which pervade the poetry of Æschylus. Ezekiel uses a similar figure, c. xxiii. 34.

This is my husband—Agamemnon: yes,
By my right hand he died—most just the deed.

Ch. Woman, what poison, what pernicious herb,
Earth-born, or nourished in the briny waves,
Thy frame infects with this demoniac rage?

Thine is the people's curse; thou hast cut off,
Transfixed thy lord; exile thy doom shall be,
And on thy steps the public hate attend.

Cl. To me the doom assigned is banishment,
The city's hatred, and the public curse;
But on this man no weight of censure falls,
Who, pitiless and stern, like one that marks
Some victim in the herd for sacrifice,
Yielded his child, loved offspring of my anguish,
To charm the fury of the winds of Thrace.

Exile *he* justly merited—but *me*
You strictly scrutinize and harshly judge.
Menace for menace I hurl back: subdue
And then rule o'er me; but if heaven perchance
The contrary decree, you'll late grow wise.

Ch. Deep in design, in act implacable,
Thou bravest all; thy mind infuriate teems

With murderous images; thy eyes flash forth
 A baleful, bloody glare: shunned by thy friends,
 This deed atrocious thou shalt expiate.*
Cl. Attend unto the tenor of my oath.
 By this last act of vengeance justly due
 To my loved daughter's shade—by the dread names
 Of Atè and Erynnys, through whose aid
 This man I sacrificed—ne'er will I tread
 The path of fear long as Ægysthus shares
 My social hearth, and still to me is true.
 He is the potent buckler of my soul.
 There my oppressor lies, the paramour
 At Troy of fair Chrysëis; cold in death
 Beside him is stretched out the captive fair,
 The prophetess, the partner of his bed,
 Whom the safe vessel wafted to these shores.

* *This deed atrocious thou shalt expiate.* Butler has adduced a sentiment from *Measure for Measure* remarkably parallel to the phraseology of the original. The Greek is *τυμμη τυμμη τισαι*.

“An Angelo for Claudio, death for death.”

Both reap their due reward: his doom is just.
She, like the dying swan, in plaintive strain
Chaunted her funeral dirge; and now, her death
Far from my pillow every care removes.*

SEMI-CHORUS.

With aspect mild, and in his train
Not leading slow disease or pain,
Oh! that kind Death would close these eyes,
Since prostrate thus my monarch lies.
For woman's wrongs he dared the field,
A woman's hand his fate has sealed.

CHORUS.

Helen, infatuate fair! what strife,
What scenes of woe, what waste of life,
Through thee 'neath Ilion's walls ensued
When Greece thy ravisher pursued.

SEMI-CHORUS.

But now with stricken hearts we mourn,
From its fair stem untimely torn,

* In this controverted passage the interpretation of Schutz is kept in view.



What scene of the war? What scene of life?

page 100

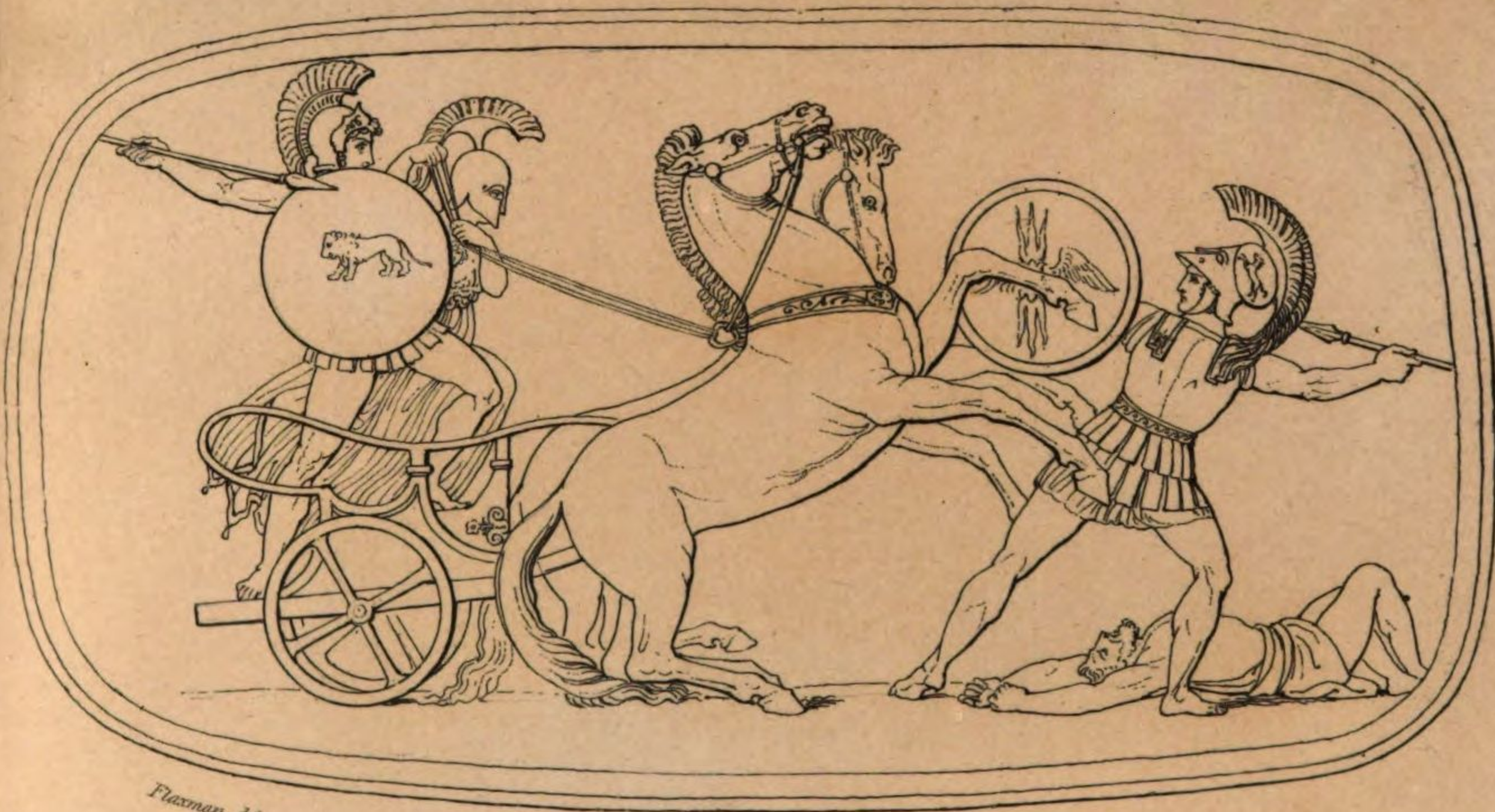
Both reap their due reward: his share
She, like the dying swan, in passion's strain
Chaunted her funeral dirge: and soon
Far from my pale eyes shall be removed.

With equal grief and equal rage
He wailing thus, his darling's fate
The cruel deed he had just done
Thus pronounced: "Thou art my life,
Thou art my soul, my heart, my eye,
A wretch's hand has done thee wrong."

Hither, hither, turn your eyes
What scenes of woe this spot will show
Through this sad vale of tears and sighs
Which heaven has sent down on you.

But now we will return to the
From his sad state of mind.

* In this controversial point, the
Schutz is kept in view.



Flaxman del.

What Strife.
What Scenes of Wee, what waste of life, &c.

page 246. 11

Our fairest flower of hope :* no time,
No rites can expiate this crime.

Cl. Invoke not death, by these events o'erwhelmed,
Nor in thy fury Helen reprobate,
As though through her alone destruction fell
On our brave hosts, and woe pervaded Greece.

SEMI-CHORUS.

Demon ! through whose relentless hate
These royal walls are desolate,
By thee possest, with fury burns
This woman's heart, and pity spurns.
Over yon mangled corpse her yell
Sounds hideous as the raven's knell.

* The corresponding passage in the original is very obscure. Among the various comments on it, that of Butler has been kept in view in the translation. He thus renders the whole passage : " Heu iniquam Helenam, quæ multas una, sane multas animas ad Trojam perdidisti, nunc autem, Clytemnestra, nobilem tu clamque Agamemnonis animam *decerpisti*."

Cl. Thou judgest well the demon to invoke,
By whom the lust of slaughter entered first.
Ere the old wound is closed another gapes.

SEMI-CHORUS.

Known to this house long since full well
Is that relentless demon's spell.
Oh bitter signs of ancient hate!
Sad memory of pernicious fate!
From Jove, supreme o'er human things,
This fated train of evils springs.

CHORUS.

My king, my lord, in vain I try
To paint my grief or loyalty.
Alas! that fatal snare, that blow
Which laid thy blooming honours low.

SEMI-CHORUS.

How mean this couch! the two-edged sword
Too fatally thy breast has gored.

Cl. Though you persist to charge this deed on me,
Yet taunt me not as Agamemnon's wife.

The ruthless demon* who the gory feast
 Of Atreus planned, my form assumed, and pierced
 This man in vengeance of those slaughtered babes.
Ch. That thou art guiltless of this horrid deed
 What tongue shall dare attest? how can it be?
 That ruthless demon might perchance assist—
 Relentless Mars is still athirst for blood
 Until the child-devouring race be scourged.

CHORUS.

My king, my lord, in vain I try
 To paint my grief or loyalty.
 Alas! that fatal snare, that blow
 Which laid thy blooming honours low.

SEMI-CHORUS.

How mean this couch! the two-edged sword
 Too fatally thy breast has gored.

* *The ruthless demon, &c.* The demon here alluded to is called *αλαστωρ*, that is, the evil genius. The same demon is alluded to v. 1457.

ἡ μέγαν οἴκοις τοῖσδε
 δαίμονα καὶ βαρύμηνιν αἰνεῖς.

Cl. His death was not ignoble, nor his crime
 Did perfidy augment; what suffers he
 But retribution for the cruel wrongs
 Of my Iphigeneia; let him not boast
 In Hades of a deed requited thus.

SEMI-CHORUS.

Where shall I turn? where go? distraction rends
 My heart: this house is tottering to its fall.
 I dread the bloody storm which rages round
 And to their centre rocks the very walls.
 The sword of justice* Destiny prepares
 Another deed injurious to requite.

CHORUS.

Oh! earth, earth, earth! I would thy jaws had oped
 And swallowed me, ere on this lowly couch,
 Within the silver bath, these eyes had seen
 My monarch's corse stretched out in death: what
 hands
 Shall pay the rites funereal? from what eyes

* *The sword of justice, &c.* An allusion to the approaching vengeance to be taken by Orestes on Clytemnestra and Ægysthus.

Descend the votive tears? Wilt *thou* presume,
Thy hands yet dropping with his gore, to pay
These honours—mingling with thy murderous acts
The solemn mockery of fictitious woe.

SEMI-CHORUS.

What friendly eyes, suffused by heartfelt tears,
What tongue sincere shall pay the tribute due?

Cl. 'Tis not for thee the funeral rites to pay;
The selfsame hands that slew shall bury him.
If no embalming tears water his tomb
From all his train domestic, he will meet,
When ferried o'er the rapid flood of griefs,
Iphigeneia's gentle form—at least
She'll with a fond embrace her father hail.

SEMI-CHORUS.

Insult on insult: what shall be the term?
How mazy is this labyrinth of fate!
The slayer's slain, and blood is shed for blood.
As Jove himself is changeless, 'tis decreed
That final vengeance shall with certain steps
O'ertake the guilty: who a race accursed
Can hope to screen? to woe this house is doomed.

CHORUS.

Oh! earth, earth, earth! I would thy jaws had oped'
 And swallowed me, ere on this lowly couch,
 Within the silver bath, these eyes had seen
 My monarch's corse stretched out in death: what hands
 Shall pay the rites funereal? from what eyes
 Descend the votive tears? Wilt thou presume,
 Thy hands yet dripping with his gore, to pay
 These honours—mingling with thy murderous deeds
 The solemn mockery of fictitious woe.

SEMI-CHORUS.

What friendly eyes, suffused by heartfelt tears,
 What tongue sincere shall pay him honours due?

Cl. His fate stamps truth upon the oracle.

Oh! that the evil genius who pursues
 The race of Plisthenes,* soothed by my oath
 To bow to his decrees, would hence depart,
 And other floors imbrue with kindred blood.
 Give me but competence! how happy then—
 And far remove these sanguinary feuds.

* Another word for the house of Atreus.

SCENE IX.

CHORUS, CLYTEMNESTRA, ÆGYSTHUS.

ÆGYSTHUS.

Oh light propitious of this vengeful day!
Now I am well convinced that human crimes
Just retribution from the gods receive,
Since prostrate on the earth I view this man,
Entangled in the net the furies spun,
His father's crime atoning. O'er this land
Atreus his father reigned: to fly his home
He forced his brother, my ill-fated sire
Thyestes, who, 'tis said, to sway the rod
Of empire sought; but soon in suppliant guise
Thyestes home returning, was beguiled
By solemn pledges, that his blood should ne'er
The soil paternal stain: a feast was given,
At which perfidious Atreus, 'midst the meats,
To my unconscious sire the roasted flesh
Of his own children gave—the hands and feet

Were not produced, suspicion to disarm.
 These meats, with evils pregnant to his race,
 He tasted; but when conscious of the fact
 His stomach spurned the execrable food.
 On the Pelopidæ his curses fell;
 Then, sinking down, his frenzied arm o'erturned
 The festive table, while his tongue implored
 That so might fall the race of Plisthenes.
 Hence this man's fate: justly I urged the deed,
 Survivor sole of thirteen children, erst
 Their father's pride: him Atreus from his face,
 With me, a babe, expelled; but to this land
 Justice herself my ripened manhood led.
 In all the mazes of this plot I shared;
 And now to die were welcome, since I view
 This man entangled in the toils of fate.
Ch. Such taunts, Ægysthus, in this scene of woe,
 Disgust me—judging by thy words, the guilt
 Of the king's murder, and the plot, is thine:
 The populace will stone thee in their wrath.
Æg. Dar'st thou, a rower of the lowest bench,
 The master thus address; soon to thy cost,

Old man, thou'lt wiser grow; famine and bonds,
 Shrewd teachers and physicians of the mind,
 Shall lend their potent aid: thou'rt unconvinced?
 Kick not against the goads*—'twill work thee harm.

Ch. Woman, didst thou, left guardian of this house,
 Defiling first thy warrior-consort's bed,
 Next plan his murder as he reached these shores?

Æg. Words such as these are harbingers of woe;
 Unlike to Orpheus is thy voice, he drew
 All objects round him by his magic strains;
 But these discordant notes would irritate
 The gentlest mind—force shall thy temper tame.

Ch. And shalt thou wield the Argive sceptre? *thou*,
 Whose coward hands refused to perpetrate
 The murderous deed thy cruel thoughts devised?

Æg. His wife alone could compass the design.
 I was of old suspected: to my sway,

* The line in the original, *πρὸς κέντρα μὴ λάκτιζε*, is a proverbial expression almost literally parallel to the words addressed to St. Paul by the heavenly voice, Acts, ix. 6, *σκληρόν σοι πρὸς κέντρα λακτίζειν*—"It is hard for thee to kick against the pricks."

Ere long, his wealth shall bend the citizens.
A heavy bit the restive steed shall curb,
Or hunger and a dungeon pride subdue.

Ch. Was it not cowardice unnerved thy arm?

Why outrage thus our land and guardian gods

His wife employing? doth Orestes live?

Oh! may he soon, by favouring fortune led,

On both your guilty heads due vengeance wreak.

Æg. What! insult still? thy punishment is sure.

Ch. Help, comrades, help! the crisis is at hand.†

Æg. * * * *

Ch. Help, help! let every man unsheath his blade.

Æg. And I in open fight am prompt to die.

Ch. We hail the omen, and appeal to fortune.

Cl. Most loved of mortals, let us not thus rush

On future evils; heavy is the store

Already reaped: these bloody thoughts restrain.

Old men, retire: if ever mortals bowed

† The critics have differed on the collocation of this line and the two following. The author follows those who think that one is wanting in the space where the asterisks are inserted.

Beneath affliction's stroke, 'tis our sad lot—
Oppressed by wrath divine: this counsel take,
Though 'tis a woman speaks.

Æg. Shall they then depart,
Their insolence of language unrepent?

Shall they insult us thus—all prudence spurn?

Ch. To flatter wicked men a Greek disdains.

Æg. Some future day my vengeance shall insure.

Ch. Not should Orestes, led by heaven, return.

Æg. I know that fugitives on hope subsist.

Ch. Pursue the selfsame course—fatten on crime;
Tread justice down, there's nought to hinder thee.

Æg. Thy folly shall not fail its due reward.

Ch. Boast like the crested cock beside his dame.

Cl. Repress thy just displeasure, scorn these threats.
Lords of this house, we'll sway the subject land.

ERRATA.

Page 177, line 13, for *ungents* read *unguents*.

245, line 16, for *safe* read *same*.

APPENDIX.

REMARKS ON THE GREEK THEATRE.

BY

C. R. COCKERELL, ESQ.

SOME remains of the ancient theatre are still discoverable in most of the considerable cities of Greece. In those of Asia Minor (especially of the interior) they are better preserved, and in many of them judicious excavations might reveal the parts relating to the stage and scene, hitherto unexplored, and which have formed so fruitful a source of discussion among modern writers. The lowest part of the *Koïλον*, or Cavea, is usually filled with the architectural members of the permanent scene and upper parts of the theatre, preserving beneath the traces of nearly every particular upon which we desire to be informed.

The plan and construction of these Theatres vary with the periods of their erection; but in general they are found to agree with the scheme given by Vitruvius, as respects the situation of the scene and extension of the Κοῖλον beyond the semi-circle; not indeed exactly according to his method, but comprising in its circumference 200 to 220 degrees of a circle. In his Fifth Book Vitruvius says, “The Greeks make use of three squares, whose angles touch the periphery of the orchestra; *that side of one of the squares which is nearest the intended situation of the scene determines the extent of the proscenium*, and a line drawn parallel to it, through the point of curvature most distant from the auditory, marks the front of the scene.” (See the diagram in the plate).

The accompanying plan is constructed according to the system observed in the best times of Grecian history: the lower portion of the Κοῖλον is supposed to be excavated in the acclivity of a hill, the upper to be built on its summit, whilst the permanent scene is composed of two orders in an unbroken line with its five doors. Such a theatre would have contained about 13,000 persons, allowing to each the space defined in

the theatre of Pompeii, of $15\frac{1}{4}$ inches: a number of sittings seldom exceeded in those of Greece.

It is unnecessary here to describe the other parts of the Greek Theatre, familiar to readers on this subject; there are, however, three essential points, which an attentive comparison of the existing remains with the notices contained in ancient writers, gives reason to believe have hitherto been much misunderstood by commentators.

The first point is, that the Greek Theatre was seldom if ever entirely enclosed with walls, so as to connect the elevation of the scene with the portico surmounting the *Koĩλον*; but, on the contrary, the inclosure was discontinued from the termination of each extremity of the arc, discovering the landscape as expressed in the plate; thus admitting the view and air from the open country; so delightful since they were commonly elevated above the surrounding scenery, and so refreshing to spectators exposed to the meridian sun of those climates. This was certainly the case in the early theatres, and it is only with reference to the Roman and those of a later period, that any doubt can exist on the subject.

The second point to be noticed is, as to the nature and signification of the proscenium as defined by Vitruvius, generally supposed to describe the situation and width of the stage ; but which it would rather appear referred to a temporary front projected from the permanent scene, in the manner of a roof or canopy : an arrangement which must have been highly convenient if not absolutely necessary for the purposes of the performance, 1st, to suspend the *αὐλαία* or great curtain, behind which the actors arranged themselves for the commencement of the drama ; 2dly, to conceal the mechanism for the moveable scenes and for the elevation of persons and objects from the stage, which, according to all accounts, was complex ; 3dly, to give shelter and shade to the performers and the painted scenery, to the effect of which the sun's rays would be destructive ; 4thly, for the concentration of the view to a due portion of the extended scene, which would otherwise have often presented to the spectators a length of 200 feet.

The proscenium was therefore, in all probability, what the term denotes, a frontispiece, temporarily projected from the permanent scene, for the purposes

above enumerated ; and which could be withdrawn under the roof of the parascene, and protected from the weather when the performance ceased, and the theatre served its purposes of political and other assemblies of the people.

It is probable, from indications discovered in existing remains, that this frontispiece was supported on beams projected from the upper entablature (see holes in the frieze) on rollers from the parascene, in the manner of corbels, having a double bearing on the columns and the wall behind, the latter of which supplied what is technically called the tailing to their projection ; and any additional support might easily be supplied from the wall above, as in a drawbridge. The utmost projection of this frontispiece does not appear to have exceeded 15 feet, something less than the width of the parascene behind, into which these beams might be drawn back.

It may be presumed that the length of the proscenium corresponded with the diameter of the orchestra, which probably never exceeded 100 feet, and was bounded by the *περίακτοι*, i. e. the triangular versatile scenes, described by Vitruvius as having on each side a different

representation, and which, he tells us, in his description of the Roman theatre, were placed in the situation marked on the plan, immediately at the sides of the two doors next the centre, termed *hospitalia* by Vitruvius, and as described upon the plate by Pollux.

When it is recollected that the utmost extent of the modern proscenium never exceeds 50 feet, we may easily judge of the practical difficulties of supposing a greater extent than that assigned to the ancient, and we may with certainty conclude that the whole extent of the permanent scene, often nearly 200 feet, could never have been occupied by the performers.

The third point to be remarked upon is the *λογεῖον*, or pulpitum, a feature of the theatre referred to by Vitruvius and Pollux as distinct from the proscenium, and which has already been pointed out by Mr. Wilkins, in his translation of Vitruvius, as in all probability a wooden and temporary stage in front of it.

Had Vitruvius indulged his readers with any dimensions of the orchestra, as he has with respect to the height of the *λογεῖον*, which he states "should never be more than 12 nor less than 10 feet," there would have been less obscurity in this part of the subject, and

commentators would never have supposed (as Genelli has done) that the orchestra might be 200 feet in diameter ; but in the absence of this information, referring to the only examples (those of Sidé and Patara in Asia Minor) in which the orchestra is clearly defined, and the remains of these edifices in other parts of Greece in which this particular remains to be ascertained, we never find the orchestra appearing to exceed 100 feet in diameter in the largest theatres : consequently the depth of the proscenium, given by the diagram of Vitruvius, could not exceed 15 feet : a space obviously much too confined for the performers and for the moveable scenes, especially when we compare this depth with the disproportionate length of the proscenium, its height from the orchestra, and the unnecessarily large space left in the orchestra for the chorus. But the width of the *λογεῖον*, added to that of the proscenium, afforded an entire depth of 30 to 40 feet—a sufficient stage for all the purposes of the drama as respects the actors and scenery, and bringing them into view from all parts of the theatre without encroaching upon the space required by the orchestra.

We may hazard a conjecture on the occasional

transformation of the *λογεῖον* to any purpose required by the drama, as a tomb, a cave, a rocky eminence or inclined shore. Its construction of wood, and the system of scenic illusion by models, (rather than painted scenery, which requires the aid of artificial light to give its full effect,) employed by the Greeks, renders the supposition highly probable. And it is to be remarked that the *ἔισοδοι* or gateways in the existing remains, are always found to be very capacious, so as to admit of framing and models of considerable dimensions.

The *hyposcenum* has been variously interpreted, but the literal meaning of the term, and the express description of Pollux, seem to warrant the conclusion that it was the ornamental front of the *λογεῖον*, towards the spectators. Its great height, 10 to 12 feet, and its conspicuous situation, required that it should be highly ornamented, and on a scale suited to the actors and scenery above it. Now it is conformable to all the practice of the ancients to give importance to the principal objects by analogous ornaments in the subordinate details : thus the small statues and columns with which this front was decorated, (*κίονες* and *ἀγαλμάτια* of Pollux) gave size and dignity to the actors, as the small

figures, which enriched the metopes of the Doric entablature, added to the size and effect of the larger figures with which the pediment was decorated.

The above suggestions may suffice to call the attention of students to these much disputed points of the Greek Theatre, and may lead them to compare the descriptions left us by the ancients with the actual remains of these edifices, and with the arrangements which must necessarily have accompanied the representation of the dramas themselves.

THE END.

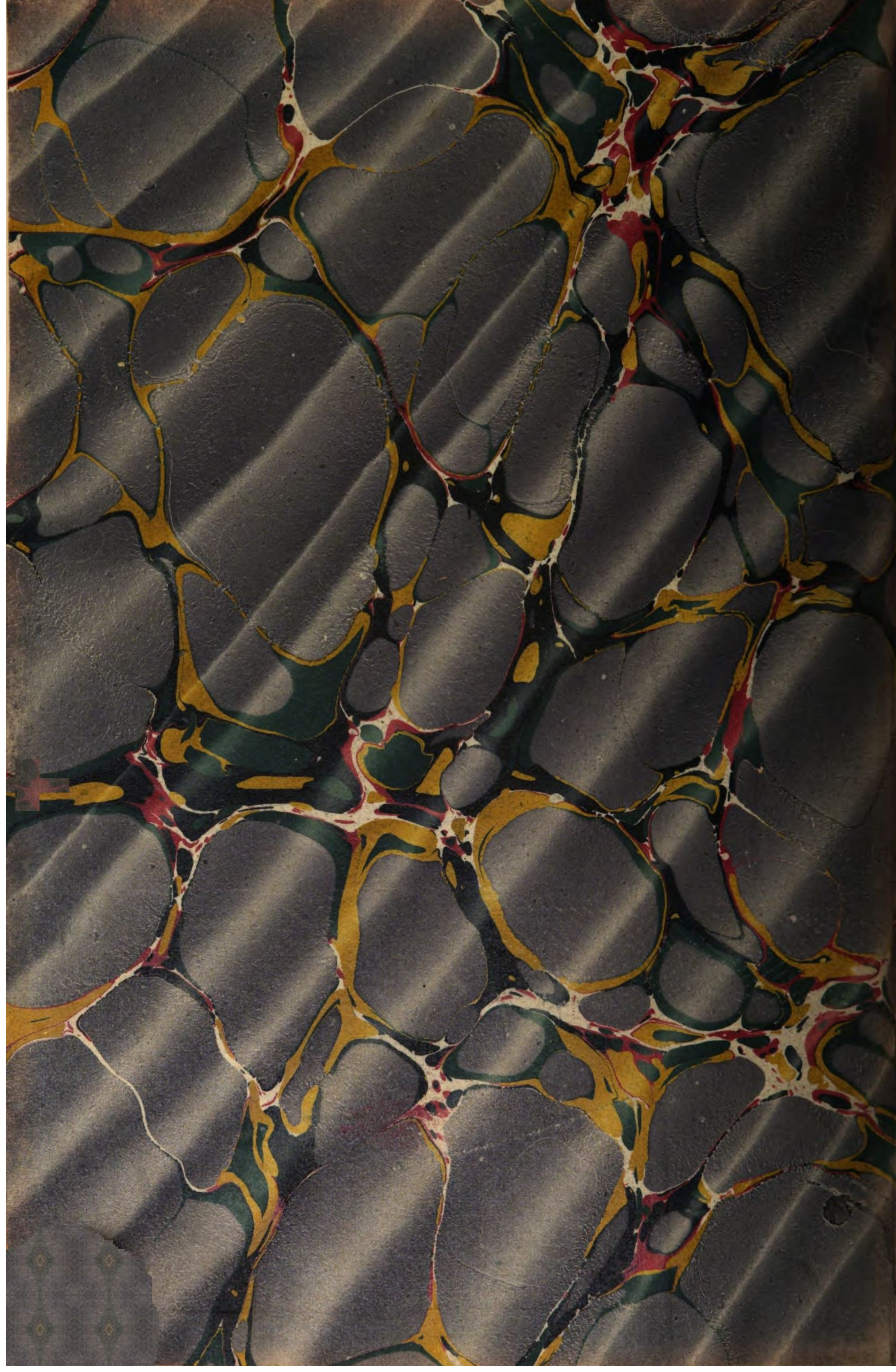
Bayerische
Staatsbibliothek
München

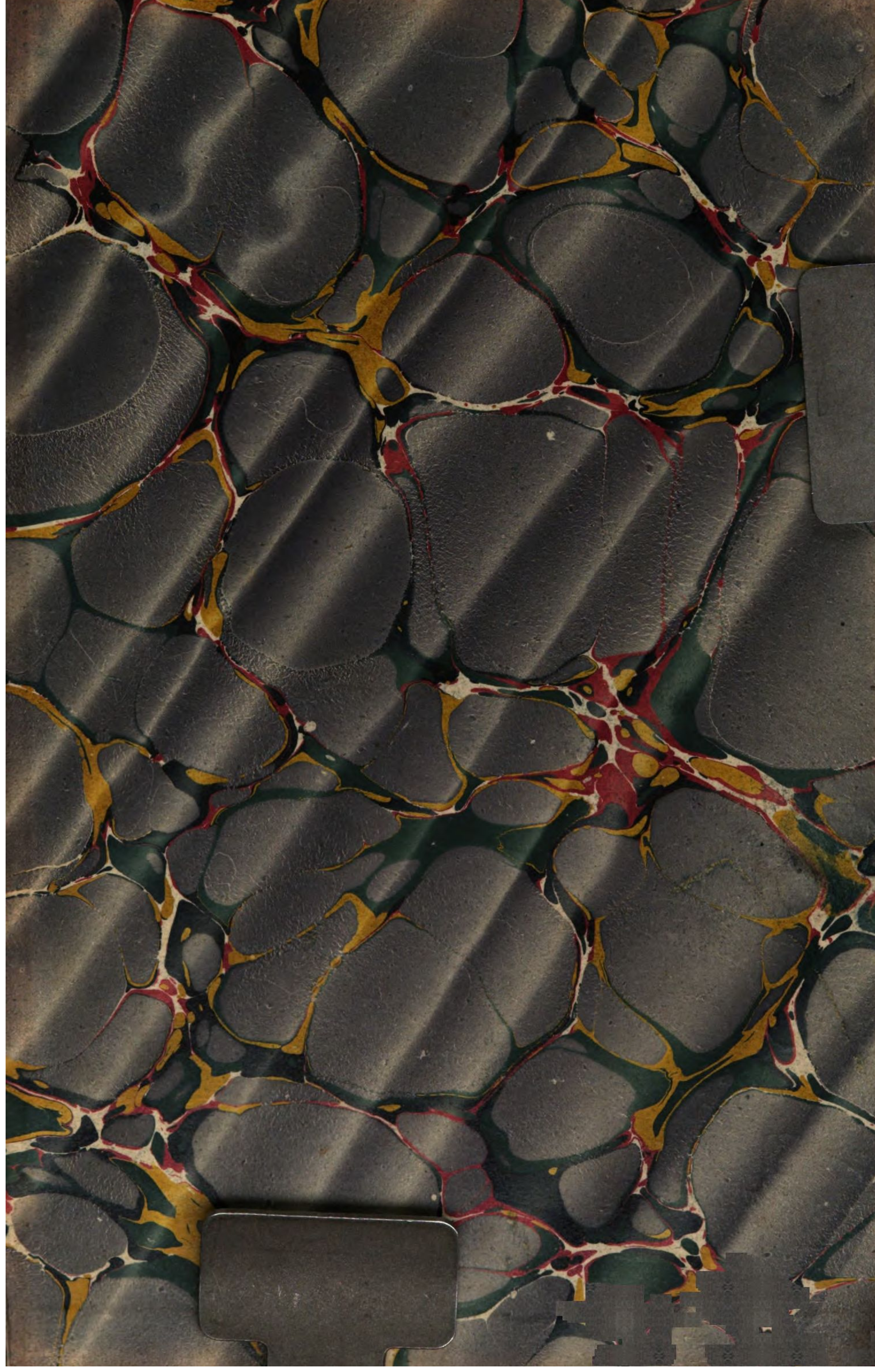
LONDON :

PRINTED BY C. ROWORTH AND SONS, BELL YARD,
TEMPLE BAR.

LONDON :

PRINTED BY E. WINDGATE AND SON, 25, MARK LANE,
NEAR ST. MARK'S CHURCH.





Aeschylus,

The Agamemnon of Aeschylus

London 1831

A.gr.a. 2807 f

urn:nbn:de:bvb:12-bsb10234378-8